

and along with these a third principle which is called 'efficient,' which Aristotle considered to be sufficient to bring effectively into existence what in his opinion should be initiated.

(2) What, therefore, is more absurd than to link the eternity of the work of creation with the eternity of God the omnipotent? Or to identify the creation itself with God so as to confer divine honors on the sky, the earth, and the sea? From this opinion there proceeds the belief that parts of the world are gods. Yet on the constitution of the world itself there is no small difference of opinion among philosophers.

(3) Pythagoras maintains that there is one world. Others say that the number of worlds is countless, as was stated by Democritus, whose treatment of the natural sciences has been granted the highest authority by the ancients.<sup>1</sup> That the world always was and always will be is the claim of Aristotle. On the other hand, Plato ventures to assert that the world did not always exist, but that it will always exist. A great many writers, however, give us evidence from their works that they believe that the world did not always exist and that it will not exist forever.

(4) How is it possible to arrive at an estimate of the truth amid such warring opinions? Some, indeed, state that the world itself is God, inasmuch as they consider that a divine mind seems to be within it, while others maintain that God is in parts of the world; others still, that He is in both—in which case it would be impossible to determine what is the appearance of God, or what is His number, position, life, or activity. If this evaluation of the world be followed, we have to understand God to be without sense, something which rotates, is round, is aflame, and impelled

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1 Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 1.120.

by certain movements—something driven, not by its own force, but by something external to it.<sup>2</sup>

## *Chapter 2*

(5) Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Moses, a holy man, foresaw that these errors would appear among men and perhaps had already appeared. At the opening of his work he speaks thus: 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth.'<sup>1</sup> He linked together the beginnings of things, the Creator of the world, and the creation of matter in order that you might understand that God existed before the beginning of the world or that He was Himself the beginning of all things. So in the Gospel, in answer to those who were inquiring of Him 'Who art thou?' He replied: 'I am the beginning, I who speak with you.'<sup>2</sup> All this was that you might know that He gave to all created things their beginnings and that He is the Creator of the world—not one who imitates matter under the guidance of some Idea, from which He formed His work, not in accordance with His will, but in compliance with a self-proposed model. Fittingly, too, Moses says: 'In the beginning He created,' in order that, where He had made clear the effect of the operation already completed, before giving an indication of its having been begun, He might thus express the incomprehensible speed of the work.

(6) Our attention should be drawn to the person who uttered this statement. He was, of course, Moses, a man learned in all the science of the Egyptians. He was rescued

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* 2.46.

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.1.

<sup>2</sup> John 8.25 (Clementine Vulgate).

from the river by the daughter of Pharaoh, who cherished him as if he were her own son and desired that he be trained and instructed in all phases of secular learning with aid furnished from the royal treasury. Although he received his name from water,<sup>3</sup> he did not consider as true the hypothesis held by Thales, that all things are derived from water. And although he had been educated in the royal palace, he preferred, because of his love of justice, to undergo voluntary exile rather than, because of his love of justice, to be a servant of sin in the midst of pleasure as a high official at a tyrant's court. Finally, before he was called to the task of liberating his people, he fell into disgrace, urged on, as he was, by his natural zeal for what is right to the extent of avenging the wrong done to his fellow countrymen. Wherefore, he tore himself away from pleasure and, shunning all the excitement of the royal palace, retired to a secluded spot in Ethiopia. There, removed from all other cares, he gave himself wholly to divine contemplation, in order that he might behold the glory of God face to face. This is in accord with the testimony of Scripture, that 'there arose no greater prophet in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.'<sup>4</sup> He spoke to God the highest, not in a vision nor in dreams, but mouth to mouth. Plainly and clearly, not by figures nor by riddles,<sup>5</sup> there was bestowed on him the gift of the divine presence.

(7) And so Moses opened his mouth and uttered what the Lord spoke within him, according to the promise He made to him when He directed him to go to King Pharaoh: 'Go therefore and I will open thy mouth and instruct thee what thou shouldst speak.'<sup>6</sup> For, if he had already accepted from God what he should say concerning the liberation of the

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Exod. 2.10.

<sup>4</sup> Deut. 34.10.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Num. 12.6-8.

<sup>6</sup> Exod. 4.12.

people, how much more should you accept what He should say concerning heaven? Therefore, 'not in the persuasive words of wisdom,' not in philosophical fallacies, 'but in the demonstration of the Spirit and power,'<sup>7</sup> he has ventured to say as if he were a witness of the divine work: 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth.' He did not look forward to a late and leisurely creation of the world out of a concourse of atoms. He did not await a pupil, so to speak, of matter, who, by contemplating it, could fashion a world. Rather, he thought that God should be declared to be its Author. Being a man full of wisdom, he noticed that the substances and the causes of things visible and invisible were contained in the divine mind. He did not hold, as the philosophers teach, that a stronger conjunction of atoms furnished the cause of their continuous duration. He pointed out that those who give such tiny and unsubstantial first principles to heaven and earth were just weaving a web like a spider's. How could these be joined together by chance as well as being dissolved in the same planless way, without a firm basis in the divine power of their Ruler? No wonder that they know not their Ruler who know not their God, by whom all things are ruled and governed. Let us follow him who knew both the Author and the Ruler, and let us not be led astray by vain opinions.

### *Chapter 3*

(8) 'In the beginning,' he said. What a good arrangement that he should first assert what these men are accustomed to deny, that they may realize, too, that there was a beginning to the world, lest men be of the opinion that the

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor.-2.4.



world was without a beginning. For this reason David, too, in speaking of 'heaven, earth, and sea,' says: 'Thou hast made all things in wisdom.'<sup>1</sup> He [Moses] gave, therefore, a beginning to the world; he gave also to the creature infirmity, lest we believe him to be without a beginning, uncreated, and still partaking in the divine essence. And fittingly he added: 'He created, lest it be thought there was a delay in creation. Furthermore, men would see also how incomparable the Creator was who completed such a great work in the briefest moment of His creative act, so much so that the effect of His will anticipated the perception of time. No one saw Him in the act of creation; they saw only the created work before them. Where, therefore, was there a delay, since you may read: 'For He spoke and they were made; He commanded and they were created'?<sup>2</sup> He who in a momentary exercise of His will completed such a majestic work employed no art or skill so that those things which were not were so quickly brought into existence; the will did not outrun the creation nor the creation, the will.

(9) You admire the work, you seek for a Creator who granted a beginning to such a great work, who so speedily made it? He [Moses] gives us the information immediately, saying that 'God created heaven and earth.' You have the name of the Creator; you ought not to have any doubts. He it is in whose name Melchisedech blessed Abraham, the forefather of many peoples, saying: 'Blessed be Abram by the most high God, creator of heaven and earth.'<sup>3</sup> And Abraham believed God and said: 'I raise my hand to the Lord God most high, creator of heaven and earth.'<sup>4</sup> You see that this was not an invention made by man, but an

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<sup>1</sup> Ps. 103.24.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 32.9; 148.5.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 14.19.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 14.22.

announcement made by God. For God is Melchisedech, that is, 'He is king of peace and justice, having neither the beginning of days nor end of life.'<sup>5</sup> No wonder, therefore, that God, who is without end, gave a beginning to all things, so that what was not began to exist. No wonder that God, who contains all things in His power and incomprehensible majesty, created the things that are visible, since He also created those things that are not visible. Who would assert that the visible is more significant than the invisible, 'for the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal'?<sup>6</sup> Who can doubt that God, who spoke by the Prophets, created these things, saying: 'Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and weighed the heavens with his palm? Who hath poised with three fingers the bulk of the earth and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who hath understood the sense of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor; or who hath taught him?'<sup>7</sup> Of Him we also read elsewhere: 'For he holds the circuit of the earth and made the earth as nothing.'<sup>8</sup> And Jeremias says: 'The gods that have not made heaven and earth will perish from the earth and from among those places that are under heaven. He that made the earth by his power and prepared the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens at his knowledge and a multitude of waters in the heaven.' And he added: 'Man is become a fool for knowledge.'<sup>9</sup> How can one who pursues the corruptible things of the world and thinks that from these things he can comprehend the truth of divine nature not become a fool as he makes use of the artifices of sophistry?

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5 Heb. 7.2,3.

6 2 Cor. 4.18.

7 Isa. 40.12,13.

8 Isa. 40.22,23.

9 Jer. 10.11-14.

(10) Since, therefore, so many oracles are heard in which God gives testimony that He made the world, do not then believe that it was without a beginning because the world is said to be, as it were, a sphere in which there would appear to be no beginning. And when it thunders, everything is stirred around about us as if in a whirling movement, so that one cannot easily comprehend either where the vortex begins or where it ends. The reason is this: To perceive by one's senses the beginning of a circle is considered to be impossible. You cannot discover the beginning of a sphere or from what point the round disk of the moon begins or where it ends in its monthly wanings. Not even if you do not understand it yourself does this phenomenon cease to begin or in any way to come to an end. If you were to draw a circle with ink or pencil or with a compass, you could not easily detect with your eyes or mentally recall after an interval of time the point where you began or where you completed your circle. Yet you are conscious that you made a beginning and also came to an end. The reason is this: What has escaped the senses has not caused the truth to be undermined.

Again, what has a beginning also has an end; it is obvious that which has an end also has a beginning. The Saviour Himself tells us in the Gospel that there is to be an end of the world, saying: 'For this world as we see it is passing away'; and 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away'; and further on: 'Behold I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world.'<sup>10</sup>

(11) How, then, can philosophers maintain that the world is co-eternal with God and make the created equal with the Creator of all things? How can they hold that the material body of the world should be linked with the

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<sup>10</sup> 1 Cor. 7.31; Matt. 24.35; 28.20.

invisible and unapproachable divine nature?—so much the more, since, according to their own teachings, they cannot deny that an object whose parts are subject to corruption and mutability must as a whole be subject to the same influences which its own separate parts undergo.

### *Chapter 4*

Therefore, He who uttered these words, 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth,' teaches us that there is a beginning. (12) The term 'beginning' has reference either to time or to number or to foundation. We see that this is true in the construction of a house: the foundation is the beginning. We know, too, from the authority of Scripture that one can speak of a beginning of a conversion or of a falling away.<sup>1</sup> The beginning of a work of art lies in the craft itself, which is the source of the individual skills of a series of craftsmen. There is also a beginning to good works. This consists in a most commendable purpose or end, as, for example, acts of charity have their source in deeds which are done to do honor to God, for we are especially urged to come to the aid of our fellow men. The term 'beginning' is applied also to the power of God. It is concerned with the category of time when we deal with the question of the time when God made heaven and earth, that is, at the commencement of the world, when it began to come into being, in the words of Wisdom: 'When he prepared the heaven I was present.'<sup>2</sup> If we apply the term to number, then it is right that you understand that at first He created heaven and earth; next, hills, regions, and the boundaries of the inhabitable world. Or we may understand that before He created the rest of

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<sup>1</sup> Wisd. 14.12-14.

<sup>2</sup> Prov. 8.27.

visible creatures, day, night, fruit-bearing trees, and the various kinds of animals He created heaven and earth. But, if you apply the term to foundation, you will see, if you read the words of Wisdom, that the beginning is the foundation: 'When he made the foundations of the earth, I was with him forming all things.'<sup>3</sup>

There is also the beginning of good instruction, as it is said: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,'<sup>4</sup> since he who fears the Lord departs from error and directs his ways to the path of virtue. Except a man fear the Lord, he is unable to renounce sin.

(13) In like manner, also, we can understand this statement: 'This month shall be to you the beginning of months.'<sup>5</sup> although that statement is to be interpreted merely of time, because there is reference to the Pasch of the Lord, which is celebrated at the beginning of spring. Therefore, He created heaven and earth at the time when the months began, from which time it is fitting that the world took its rise. Then there was the mild temperature of spring, a season suitable for all things.

Consequently, the year, too, has the stamp of a world coming to birth, as the splendor of the springtime shines forth all the more clearly because of the winter's ice and darkness now past. The shape of the circles of years to come has been given form by the first dawn of the world. Based on that precedent, the succession of years would tend to arise, and at the commencement of each year new seedlings would be produced, as the Lord God has said: 'Let the earth bring forth the green herb and such as may seed, and the fruit tree, yielding fruit after its kind. And immediately the earth produced the green herb and the fruit-bearing

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<sup>3</sup> Prov. 8.29,30.

<sup>4</sup> Prov. 1.7.

<sup>5</sup> Exod. 12.2.



tree.’<sup>6</sup> By this very fact both the constant mildness of divine Providence and the speed in which the earth germinates favor for us the hypothesis of a vernal period. For, although it was in the power of God to ordain creation at any time whatsoever and for earthly nature to obey, so that amid winter’s ice and frost earth might bear and produce fruits under the fostering hand of His celestial power, He refrained. It was not in His eternal plan that the land held fast in the rigid bonds of frost should suddenly be released to bear fruits and that blooming plants should mingle with frosts unsightly.<sup>7</sup>

Wherefore, in order to show that the creation of the world took place in the spring, Scripture says: ‘This month shall be to you the beginning of months, it is for you the first in the months of the year,’<sup>8</sup> calling the first month the springtime. It was fitting that the beginning of the year be the beginning of generation and that generation itself be fostered by the gentler breezes. The tender germs of matter would be unable to endure exposure to the bitter cold of winter or to the torrid heat of summer.<sup>9</sup>

(14) At the same time, one may note, since it belongs here by right, that the entrance into this generation and into this way of life seems to have occurred at the time when the regular transition from this generation to regeneration takes place.

The sons of Israel left Egypt in the season of spring and passed through the sea, being baptized in the cloud and in the sea, as the Apostle said.<sup>10</sup> At that time each year the Pasch of Jesus Christ is celebrated, that is to say, the passing over from vices to virtues, from the desires of the flesh to

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6 Gen. 1.11.

7 Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 2.330-345; Lucretius 5.783-792.

8 Exod. 12.2.

9 Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 2.343-345.

10 Cf. 1 Cor. 10.1.



grace and sobriety of mind, from the unleavened bread of malice and wickedness to truth and sincerity.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, the regenerated are thus addressed: 'This month shall be to you the beginning of months; it is for you the first in the months of the year.'

The person who is baptized leaves behind and abandons in a spiritual sense that prince of the world, Pharaoh, when he says: 'I renounce thee, devil, both thy works and thy power.'<sup>12</sup> No longer will he serve him, either by the earthly passions of his body or by the errors of a corrupt mind. On this occasion every evil deed of his sinks to the bottom like lead. Protected as he is by good works on his right and his left, he endeavors to cross over the waters of this life with step untainted.

Scripture also says in the book called Numbers: 'Amalec, the beginning of nations, whose seed will be destroyed.'<sup>13</sup> And, of course, Amalec is not the first of all nations. Amalec, in fact, is interpreted to mean the king of the wicked and by the wicked it is intended to mean the Gentiles. There is no reason why we should not accept him as one whose seed shall perish. His seed are the wicked and the unfaithful, to whom the Lord says: 'You are the voice of your father the devil.'<sup>14</sup>

(15) A beginning in a mystical sense is denoted by the statement: 'I am the first and last, the beginning and the end.'<sup>15</sup> The words of the Gospel are significant in this connection, especially wherein the Lord, when asked who He was, replied: 'I am the beginning, I who speak with you.'<sup>16</sup> In truth, He who is the beginning of all things by virtue of

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11 Cf. 1 Cor. 5.8.

12 John 14.30.

13 Num. 24.20.

14 Cf. John 8.44.

15 Apoc. 1.8.

16 John 8.25 (Clementine Vulgate).

His divinity is also the end, because there is no one after Him. According to the Gospel, the beginning of the ways of God is in His work, so that the race of men might learn by Him to follow the ways of the Lord and to perform the works of God.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, in this beginning, that is, in Christ, God created heaven and earth, because 'All things were made through him and without him was made nothing that was made.'<sup>18</sup> Again: 'In him all things hold together and he is the firstborn of every creature.'<sup>19</sup> Moreover, He was before every creature because He is holy. The firstborn indeed are holy, as 'the firstborn of Israel,'<sup>20</sup> not in the sense of being before all, but because the firstborn are holier than the rest. The Lord is holy above all creatures for the very reason that He assumed a body. He alone is without sin and without vanity, while all 'creation was made subject to vanity.'<sup>21</sup>

(16) We can also understand that the statement, 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth,' has reference to a period. The beginning of a journey is not yet a completion, nor is the beginning of a building yet the finished house.

Finally, others have interpreted the Greek phrase ἐν κεφαλῇ as if *in capite*, by which is meant that in a brief moment the sum of the operation was completed. Then there are also those who interpret the beginning not in a temporal sense, but as something before time. Hence, they use the Greek word κεφάλαιον in the sense of its Latin equivalent, *caput*, indicating by this the sum of the work. Heaven and earth, in fact, are the sum of the invisible things which appear not only as the adornment of this world, but also as a testimony of invisible things and as 'an evidence of things

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Prov. 8.22.

<sup>18</sup> John 1.3.

<sup>19</sup> Col. 1.15.

<sup>20</sup> Exod. 4.22.

<sup>21</sup> Rom. 8.20.

that are not seen,'<sup>22</sup> according to the prophecy: 'The heavens show forth the glory of God and the firmament declareth the work of his hands.'<sup>23</sup> The Apostle, inspired by the above, expresses in other words the same thought when he says: 'For his invisible attributes are understood through the things that are made.'<sup>24</sup> We can find it easy to understand, then, that the Creator of Angels, Dominations, and Powers is He who in a moment of His power made this great beauty of the world out of nothing, which did not itself have existence and gave substance to things or causes that did not themselves exist.

### *Chapter 5*

(17) This world is an example of the workings of God, because, while we observe the work, the Worker is brought before us. The arts may be considered in various aspects. There are those which are practical. These relate to the movement of the body or to the sound of the voice. When the movement or the sound has passed away, there is nothing that survives or remains for the spectators or the hearers. Other arts are theoretical. These display the vigor of the mind. There are other arts of such a nature that, even when the processes of operation cease, the handiwork remains visible. As an example of this we have buildings or woven material which, even when the craftsman is silent, still exhibit his skill, so that testimony is presented of the craftsman's own work. In a similar way, this work is a distinctive mark of divine majesty from which the wisdom of God is made manifest. On beholding this, raising the eyes of his mind at the same time to the things invisible, the Psalmist

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<sup>22</sup> Heb. 11.1.

<sup>23</sup> Ps. 18.1.

<sup>24</sup> Rom. 1.20.

says: 'How great are thy works, O Lord; Thou hast made all things in wisdom.'<sup>1</sup>

(18) Certainly not without reason do we read that the world was made, for many of the Gentiles who maintain that the world is co-eternal with God, as if it were a shadow of divine power, affirm also that it subsists of itself. Although they admit that the cause of it is God, they assert that the cause does not proceed from His own will and rule. Rather, they make it to be analogous to the shadow in respect to the body. For the shadow stays close to the body and a flash follows the light more by natural association than by exercise of free will.

Therefore, Moses says most commendably that 'God created heaven and earth.' He did not say that He made it subsist or that He provided a cause for the world to exist. Rather, He created it as a good man makes what would be of use, as a philosopher propounding his best thoughts, as one all-powerful foreseeing what is to be the most magnificent. Again, how can one imagine a shadow where a body did not exist, since there cannot be a corporeal shadow where a body did not exist, since there cannot be a corporeal shadow of an incorporeal God? Also, how can the brilliance of incorporeal light be corporeal?

(19) If you are seeking after the splendor of God, the Son is the image of the invisible God. As God is, so is the image. God is invisible; then the image also is invisible. It is 'the brightness of the glory of His Father and an image of His substance.'<sup>2</sup> 'In the beginning,' we are told, 'God created heaven and earth.' And the world was therefore created and that which was not began to exist. And the word of God was in the beginning and always was.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ps. 103.24.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. 1.3.

<sup>3</sup> John 1.1.

The Angels, Dominations, and Powers, although they began to exist at some time, were already in existence when the world was created. For all things 'were created, things visible and things invisible, whether Thrones or Dominations or Principalities or Powers. All things,' we are told, 'have been created through and unto him.'<sup>2</sup>

What is meant by 'created unto him'? Because He is the heir of the Father, from the fact that inheritance passed from the Father unto Him, as the Father says: 'Ask of me and I will give thee the Gentiles for thine inheritance.'<sup>4</sup> This inheritance nevertheless passed to the Son and returns from the Son to the Father. And so in notable fashion the Apostle said in this place that the Son was the Author of all things, one who holds all things by His majesty. Addressing the Romans, he says concerning the Father: 'For from him and through him and unto him are all things.'<sup>6</sup> 'From him' means the beginning and origin of the substance of the universe, that is, by His will and power. For all things began by His will, because one only is the Father, from whom all things come. By this is meant that He created through Himself, who created from what source He desired. 'Through him' means the continuation of the universe; 'unto him' means its end.

'From him,' therefore, is the material; 'through him,' the operation by which the universe is bound and linked together; 'unto him,' because as long as He wishes all things remain and endure by His power and the end of all things is directed toward the will of God, by whose free act all things are resolved.

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<sup>4</sup> Col. 1.16.

<sup>5</sup> Ps. 2.8.

<sup>6</sup> Rom. 11.36.

*Chapter 6*

(20) In the beginning of time, therefore, God created heaven and earth. Time proceeds from this world, not before the world. And the day is a division of time, not its beginning.

In the course of our account we may affirm that the Lord created day and night, which constitute time changes. And on the second day He created the firmament by which He divided the water which was under the heaven from the water above the heaven. Nevertheless, for our present purposes it is sufficient to assert that in the beginning He created the heaven, from which proceeds the preliminary cause of generation, and created the earth, in which existed the substance of generation.

In fact, with heaven and earth were created those four elements from which are generated everything in the world. The elements are four in number: heaven, fire, water, and earth—elements which are found mingled in all things. You may find fire also in earth, for it frequently arises from stones and iron; you may find it also in the heavens, since it may take fire and the skies may gleam with brilliant stars. In the heavens, too, we can perceive the presence of water, which is either above the heavens or from that high position falls frequently to earth in heavy rainstorms.

We can in many ways demonstrate this, if we observe that these elements are of advantage in the building of a church. But, since it is not profitable to be concerned with this, let us rather turn our attention to those matters which may be fruitful for eternal life.

(21) It is sufficient, therefore, to set forth what we find in the writings of Isaias concerning the nature and the substance of the heavens. In modest and familiar language he described the nature of the heavens when he said that God



'hath fixed the heavens like smoke,'<sup>1</sup> desiring to declare it to be not of solid but of subtle nature.

As to its form, what Isaias has said about the firmament of the heavens makes it more than clear that God created 'heaven like a vault,' because within the range of heaven all things which move in the sea and land are enclosed. This is the implication, too, of what we read that 'God stretched out the heavens.'<sup>2</sup> He stretched it out as you would stretch skins over tents, the dwelling places of the saints, or as a scroll, that the names of many be inscribed therein who merited the grace of Christ by their faith and devotion. To all such it is said: 'Rejoice in this that your names are written in heaven.'<sup>3</sup>

(22) On the nature and position of the earth there should be no need to enter into discussion at this point with respect to what is to come. It is sufficient for our information to state what the text of the Holy Scriptures establishes, namely, that, 'he hangeth the earth upon nothing.'<sup>4</sup>

What need is there to discuss whether the earth hangs in the air or rests on the water? From this would arise a controversy as to whether the nature of the air which is slight and yielding is such as to sustain a mass of earth; also, the question would arise, if the earth rested on the waters, would not the earth by its weight fall and sink into the waters? Or would not the waters of the sea give way to the earth and, moved from its accustomed place, would not the sea pour itself over the borders of the land?

There are many, too, who have maintained that the earth, placed in the midst of the air, remains motionless there by its own weight, because it extends itself equally on all

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<sup>1</sup> Isa. 51.6.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. 40.22.

<sup>3</sup> Luke 10.20.

<sup>4</sup> Job 26.7.

sides. As to this subject, let us reflect on what was said by the Lord to His servant Job when He spoke through the clouds: 'Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched the line upon it? Or upon what are the circles grounded? And further on: 'I shut up the sea with doors, and I said: Hitherto thou shalt come and shalt go no further, but in thee shall be broken thy waves.'<sup>5</sup> Does not God clearly show that all things are established by His majesty, not by number, weight, and measures? For the creature has not given the law; rather, he accepts it or abides by that which has been accepted.

The earth is therefore not suspended in the middle of the universe like a balance hung in equilibrium, but the majesty of God holds it together by the law of His own will, so that what is steadfast should prevail over the void and unstable. The Prophet David also bears witness to this when he says: 'He has founded the earth upon its own bases: it shall not be moved for ever and ever.'<sup>6</sup> There, certainly, God is asserted to be not merely an artist, but one who is omnipotent, as one who suspended the earth, not from some central point, but from the firmament according to His command, and did not allow it to sway. We ought not to accept the measurement as coming from the center, but as the result of a divine decree, because the measurement is not that of an art, but that of power, of justice and of knowledge. All things do not escape His wisdom as if they were immeasurable, but underlie His knowledge as if they were already measured. When we read: 'I have established the pillars thereof,'<sup>7</sup> we cannot believe that the world was supported

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<sup>5</sup> Job. 38.4-6,8,11.

<sup>6</sup> Ps. 103.5.

<sup>7</sup> Ps. 74.4.

actually by columns, but rather by that power that props up the substance of the earth and sustains it.

How the disposition of the earth therefore depends upon the power of God, you may learn also where it is written: 'He looketh upon the earth and maketh it tremble,'<sup>8</sup> and elsewhere: 'One again I move the earth.'<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the earth remains immovable not by its balances, but is moved frequently by the nod and free will of God, as Job, too, says: 'The Lord shaketh it from its foundations, and the pillars thereof tremble.' And elsewhere: 'Hell is naked before him and there is no covering for death. He stretched out the north over the empty space and hangeth the earth upon nothing. He bindeth up the waters in his clouds. The pillars of heaven fled away and are in dread at his rebuke. By his power the seas are calmed, by his wisdom is struck down the sea-monster, and the gates of heaven fear him.'<sup>10</sup>

By the will of God, therefore, the earth remains immovable. 'The earth standeth for ever,' according to Ecclesiastes,<sup>11</sup> yet is moved and nods according to the will of God. It does not therefore continue to exist because based on its own foundations. It does not stay stable because of its own props. The Lord established it by the support of His will, because 'in his hand are all the ends of the earth.'<sup>12</sup> The simplicity of this faith is worth all the proffered proofs.

Let others hold approvingly that the earth never will fall, because it keeps its position in the midst of the world in accordance with nature. They maintain that it is from necessity that the earth remains in its place and is not inclined in another direction, as long as it does not move contrary to nature but in accordance with it. Let them take occasion to

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8 Ps. 103.32.

9 Agg. 2.7.

10 Job 9.6; 26.6-11.

11 Eccle. 1.4.

12 Ps. 94.4.

magnify the excellence of their divine Artist and eternal Craftsman. What artist is not indebted to Him? 'Who gave to women the knowledge of weaving or the understanding of embroidery?'<sup>13</sup> However, I who am unable to comprehend the excellence of His majesty and His art do not entrust myself to theoretical weights and measures. Rather, I believe that all things depend on His will, which is the foundation of the universe and because of which the world endures up to the present.

For this belief one may find authority also in the words of the Apostle. It is written: 'For creation was made subject to vanity—not by its own will, but by reason of him who made it subject—in hope,' because creation itself will also be delivered from its slavery to corruption when the grace of divine reward will shine forth.<sup>14</sup>

(23) Why should I enumerate the theories which philosophers in their discussions have woven concerning the nature and composition of the substance of the heavens?

While some maintain that the heavens are composed of the four elements, others assign the formation of the heavens to what is called a fifth nature of a new body. They conceive this body to be ethereal and unmixed with fire, air, water or earth, whereas the elements of this world have their own special course and customary motion according to nature, the heavier elements sinking downward; the light and rare elements rising upwards. Each of these elements has, in fact, its own proper motion. However, in the circular quality of a sphere these elements are confused and lose the impulse of their course, inasmuch as a sphere is turned around in its orb and hence the elements above change place with the elements beneath and vice-versa. And where these movements have undergone change in accordance with

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Job 38.36 (Septuagint).

<sup>14</sup> Rom. 8.20; cf. 8.21.

nature, they state that by necessity the quality of the substances therein usually suffers a corresponding change. Well, then, should we defend the theory of an ethereal body, lest the heavens appear subject to corruption?

What is composed of corruptible elements, for example, must of necessity undergo dissolution. This is seen from the fact that these elements are of different nature and cannot have a simple and unalterable motion, since a diverse movement of the elements leads to discord. There cannot be, in fact, one motion appropriate to and in accord with elements that are opposite; what is suitable to the lighter elements does not befit the weightier one. Accordingly, where there is a necessary motion of the heavens upwards, this is weighed down by the terrestrial elements. On the other hand, when there is an impulse to a downward motion, there is fiery opposition from the fiery element, for it is being forced downward contrary to its usual course. Everything which is impelled in a contrary direction does not comply with its nature. Rather, it is quickly dissolved by necessity and is broken up into those parts out of which it seems to be composed, each part returning respectively to its own peculiar place. For this reason, other philosophers, noting that these elements are unstable, have been led to believe that the substance of the heavens and of the stars is ethereal. They introduced what they called a fifth corporeal nature, which they thought was sufficient to give an enduring permanency to the substance of the heavens.<sup>15</sup>

(24) But this opinion could not withstand the words of the Prophet, which the divine majesty of our Lord Jesus Christ, our God, has confirmed in the Gospel. For David has said: 'In the beginning, O Lord, thou foundest the earth and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish but thou remainest, and all of them shall grow old as a

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<sup>15</sup> See W. Turner, *History of Philosophy* (Boston 1903) 145.

garment. And as vesture thou shalt change them and they shall be changed. But thou art always the selfsame and thy years shall not fail.'<sup>16</sup> To such a degree did the Lord confirm this that He said: 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.'<sup>17</sup>

They labor to no purpose who, in order to claim perpetuity for the heavens, have thought it best to introduce the so-called fifth ethereal body, although they can see, as well as I can, that, if an entirely dissimilar part is attached to a body, it usually gives that body a defect rather than otherwise. At the same time, take note that the Prophet David, in mentioning the earth first and after that the heavens, believed that the work of the Lord should be made manifest. When he said: 'He spoke and they were made,'<sup>18</sup> it is of no consequence what you assert first, since both were done at the same time, in order to preclude the idea that the heavens may appear to have been given the priority in the divine substance, so as to be considered of more importance by right of primogeniture in the order of created things.

Accordingly, let us leave these men to their contentions, men who contradict themselves by their mutual disputes. Sufficient for our salvation is not disputatious controversy but doctrine—not the cleverness of argumentation, but fidelity of the mind—that we may serve, not a creature, but our Creator, who is God, blessed for all ages.

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<sup>16</sup> Ps. 101.26-28.

<sup>17</sup> Matt. 24.35.

<sup>18</sup> Ps. 148.5.



## THE SECOND HOMILY

*Chapter 7*

(25) 'And the earth was void and without forms.'<sup>1</sup> The good architect lays the foundation first, and afterwards, when the foundation has been laid, plots the various parts of the building, one after the other, and then adds thereto the ornamentation. When the foundation of the earth has been laid and the substance of the heavens stabilized—these two are, as it were, the hinges of the universe—he added: 'And the earth was void and without form.' What is the meaning of the word 'was'? Perhaps that men may not extend their hypothesis to refer to something without end and without beginning and say: See how matter, the so-called ὕλη of the philosophers, did not have a beginning according even to the divine Scriptures. However, to those who hold this belief you will reply that it is written: 'And Cain was a husbandman.' And concerning him who was called Jubal, Scripture states: 'He was father of them who played upon the psalter and the cithern.'<sup>2</sup> Also: 'There was a man in the land of Austide whose name was Job.'<sup>3</sup> Let them cease, therefore, to raise questions on the meaning of the word, especially since Moses had already asserted: 'God created the earth.' It 'was' therefore from the fact that it was 'created.'

If they say that it was without beginning, maintaining that not only God, but also ὕλη, had no beginning, let them give a clear answer to the question: Where, indeed, was it? If it was in some place, then the place, too, is asserted to

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.2.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 4.2,21.

<sup>3</sup> Job 1.1. (Septuagint).

have been without a beginning, in which place was the material of the universe, which according to them had no beginning. But, if it seems absurd to think of a place, then perhaps we ought to imagine a flying earth, which, lacking a foundation, was suspended 'by the oarage of its wings.'<sup>4</sup> Whence, therefore, can we lay hold of wings for it, unless, perchance, we were to interpret and apply thereto the words of the Prophet: 'From the wings of the earth we have heard prodigies,' and 'Woe to the land to the oarage of ships.'<sup>5</sup>

But, following this interpretation, in what air did the earth fly? It could not fly without air. Yet air could not yet have existed, because without material for the world no distinction of the elements had been made, since up to this point the elements had not been created. Where, then, was this material supported 'by the oarage of wings'? It was not in the air, because the air is a body of the world. The Scriptures teach us that air is a body, because 'when an arrow is shot at a mark,' aimed at by the bowman, 'the air presently cometh together again.'<sup>6</sup>

Where, therefore, was the ὕλη [material]? Are you to suppose by some notion that it was God? God, a spirit most pure and incomprehensible, with a nature that is invisible and incorruptible, who 'dwells in light inaccessible,'<sup>7</sup> was therefore the place of the material of the world? And was God a part of this world, of which not even the meanest of the servants of God have a part, as we are told in the Scriptures: 'They are not of this world, even as I am not of the world.'<sup>8</sup>

(26) How, then, have things visible associated themselves with the invisible and how has that which is disorganized

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4 Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.301.

5 Isa. 24.16; 18.1 (Septuagint).

6 Wisd. 5.12.

7 1 Tim. 6.16.

8 John 17.16.

been linked with Him who has bestowed order and beauty on all things? Unless, perchance, they believe that the earth was invisible of itself in its substance, because it had been said: 'And the earth was invisible.' Or they might hold that the earth was invisible for the reason that when covered by water it could not be seen by mortal eyes, just as much as that which lies in deep water escapes the notice of our sharpest eyes. Nothing, in fact, is invisible to God, but something created in this world has, in this instance, been thought to be invisible to him by one who, too, is created.

Invisible, also, was the earth, because the light which illumined the world did not as yet exist, nor did the sun. The luminaries of the sky were, in fact, created later. But, if the rays of the sun frequently illuminate even that which is covered by water and reveal by the brilliance of its light things immersed in the depths, who would doubt that He can see what is invisible in the deep? Unless, perchance, we are to hold that the earth was invisible, because the earth was not yet visited by the Word and protection of God—the earth which did not yet contain man, for whose sake the Lord looked down upon the earth, as it is written: 'The Lord hath looked down upon the children of men, to see if there be any that understand and seek God.' And elsewhere He says: 'Thou hast caused judgment to be hurled from heaven: the earth trembled and was still.'<sup>9</sup> And justly is the earth called invisible, because it was without order, not having as yet received from its Creator its appropriate form and beauty.

(27) And perhaps they may say: Why did not God, in accordance with the words, 'He spoke and they were made,'<sup>10</sup> grant to the elements at the same time as they arose their appropriate adornments, as if He, at the moment

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<sup>9</sup> Ps. 13.2; 75.9.

<sup>10</sup> Ps. 148.5.

of creation, were unable to cause the heavens immediately to gleam with studded stars and the earth to be clothed with flowers and fruit? That could very well have happened. Yet Scripture points out that things were first created and afterwards put in order, lest it be supposed that they were not actually created and that they had no beginning, just as if the nature of things had been, as it were, generated from the beginning and did not appear to be something added afterwards. 'And the earth was without form,' we read, yet these same philosophers accord to it the privileges of immortality which they grant God. What would they say if its beauty shone forth from the beginning? The earth is described as immersed in water, condemned, as it were, to a shipwreck in its own first principles. Yet, some do not believe that the earth was made. What, then, if it lay claim to ornament from the moment of its creation?

Add to this the fact that God willed it that we be imitators of Himself, so that we first make something and afterwards beautify it. We would run the danger of attempting two projects at one time and accomplishing neither. And our faith grows strong step by step. For that reason, God created first and afterwards beautified, in order that we may believe that He who made and He who adorned were one and the same person. Otherwise, we might suppose that one adorned and that another performed the act of creation, whereas the same person achieved both, creating first and afterwards adorning, in order that one act might be believed as a result of the other.

You find in the Gospel clear testimony on this subject. For the Lord, when proposing to raise Lazarus to life, first ordered the Jews to remove the stone from the sepulcher, in order that, on seeing him dead, they might believe afterwards that he had risen from the dead. Next, He called Lazarus by name, and he arose and came forth with his

hands and feet bound.<sup>11</sup> Could not He who was able to restore the dead to life also remove the stone? And could not He who was able to restore the dead man to life also set him free from his bonds? Could not He who granted Lazarus power to walk with his feet still bound also render it possible for him to come forth with his fetters already broken? Of course, we see that He wished to point out first that the man was dead, so that they might believe with their own eyes. The next step was to raise him from the dead and the third to bid them unbind with their own hands the mortuary bands. By this process faith might be engendered in the hearts of the incredulous and belief come to life gradually, step by step.

### *Chapter 8*

(28) God created first, therefore, heaven and earth, but He did not will them to be perpetual; rather, they subserve the final end of our corruptible nature. Hence, in the book of Isaias He says: 'Lift up your eyes to heaven and look down on the earth beneath: for the heavens have the compactness of smoke and the earth shall be worn away like a garment.'<sup>1</sup> This is the earth which before was unformed. The seas were not yet confined within their limits and the earth was inundated by a deep flood. Observe that even now the earth has become unsightly with marshy mire and is not subject to the plough<sup>2</sup> where water has everywhere covered the land. The land was, therefore, unformed, since it was as yet unploughed by the industrious attentions of the farmer,

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. John 11.39-44.

<sup>1</sup> Isa. 51.6.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 2.223.



for the cultivator had still to appear. It was unformed because it was devoid of growing plants. The banks of streams lacked their grassy slopes; the land was not shady with groves or productive in fruits of the earth. The overhanging brows of the mountains did not produce shade; flowers did not as yet give forth odors; still unknown were the delights of the vineyard. Correctly, then, was the land called unformed which was devoid of ornament and which did not present to view the linked rows of budding vine shoots. God wished to show us that the world itself would have no attraction unless a husbandman had improved it with varied culture. The very heavens, when seen covered with clouds, often inspire men with dread fear and with sadness of heart. The earth, when saturated with rain, arouses our aversion. Who is not moved to fright by the sight of stormy seas? Most admirable is the aspect of created things. But what would they have been without light, what would they have been without heat and without the gathering together of waters, in which element some have supposed that this universe of ours, when once immersed, had its primal origin. Take away the sun from the earth; take away the round spheres of stars from the sky—every object is then shrouded in dread darkness. Thus it was before the Lord poured light into this world.

And for that reason Scripture says: 'Darkness was over the abyss.'<sup>3</sup> There was darkness because the brilliance of light was absent; there was darkness because the air itself was dark. Water itself beneath a cloud is dark because 'dark are the waters in the clouds of air.'<sup>4</sup> There was, therefore, darkness over the abyss of waters. I am not of the opinion that by darkness are to be understood the powers of evil, in that their wickedness was brought about by God. The reason is, of

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<sup>3</sup> Gen. 1.2.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 17.12.



course, that evil is not a substance, but an accident and that it is a deviation from the goodness of nature.

(29) Accordingly, a discussion of the question of evil in the constitution of the world should be laid aside for the moment, lest we seem to mingle that which is depraved with the work that is divine and with the beauty of the created. Especially should this be so for the reason that Scripture adds: 'And the spirit of God moved over the waters.'<sup>5</sup> Although some consider this spirit as air, others think of it as the vital breath of the air which we take in and emit. However, in agreement with the saints and the faithful we consider this to be the Holy Spirit, so that the operation of the Holy Trinity clearly shines forth in the constitution of the world. Preceded by the statement that 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth,' that is, God created it in Christ or the Son of God had, as God, created it or God created it through the Son, since 'all things were made through him and without him was made nothing that was made.'<sup>6</sup> There was still to come the plenitude of the operation in the Spirit, as it is written: 'By the word of the Lord the heavens were established and all the power of them by the spirit of his mouth.'<sup>7</sup> As we are instructed in the psalm concerning the work of the Word, which is the work of God, and on the power which the Holy Spirit bestowed, so is echoed here the prophetic oracle, namely, that 'God spoke' and 'God created' and 'the Spirit of God moved over the waters.' While adorning the firmament of the heavens, the Spirit fittingly moved over the earth, destined to bear fruit, because by the aid of the Spirit it held the seeds of new birth which were to germinate according to the words of the Prophet: 'Send forth thy Spirit and they shall be created

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<sup>5</sup> Gen. 1.2.

<sup>6</sup> John 1.3.

<sup>7</sup> Ps. 32.6.

and thou shalt renew the face of the earth.’<sup>8</sup> Finally, the Syriac text, which is close to the Hebrew and agrees with it in word for the most part, expresses it in this fashion: ‘And the Spirit of God brooded over the waters,’ that is, gave life, in order to help the birth of new creatures and by cherishing them give them the breath of life. For the Holy Spirit, too, is called Creator, as we read in Job: ‘The divine Spirit which made me.’<sup>9</sup>

If, therefore, the Holy Spirit moved over the waters, there could not exist, just where the Spirit claimed such honor, the darkness of forces which are contrary to it. But if, as some would have it, we are to interpret ‘Spirit’ as ‘air,’ let these people answer the question: How did the Scripture speak of the ‘Spirit of God,’ when it would have been sufficient to mention simply ‘Spirit’?

(30) These would have it, then, that first the four elements were generated by the Lord our God—that is, heaven, earth, sea, and air—for the reason that fire and air are the causes of things, while earth and water furnish the material from which are derived the beauty and form of the world. Where, therefore, could the darkness of the spirits of evil find a place, when the world has vested itself with the beauty of this august figure? Are we to hold that God at the same time created evil? But evil arose from us, and was not made by a Creator God. It is produced by the lightness of our morals; it has no prior right over any created thing, nor has it the dignity of a natural substance. It is a fault due to our mutability and is an error due to our fall. God desires it to be eradicated from the souls of each and everyone. How, then, could He have generated it? The Prophet cries out: ‘Cease to do perversely.’<sup>10</sup> And

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<sup>8</sup> Ps. 103.30.

<sup>9</sup> Job 33.4.

<sup>10</sup> Isa. 1.16.

holy David has stated it with definiteness: 'Turn away from evil and do good.'<sup>11</sup> How, then, can we assign to God the beginning of evil?

But this is the fatal theory of those who thought the Church should be thrown into confusion. From this are derived the sect of Marcio, of Valentinus;<sup>12</sup> hence, too, that deadly pest of the Manichaeans which attempted to bring contagion to the minds of the faithful. Why do we search of ourselves to see in the light of life the darkness of death? Divine Scripture confers salvation on us and is fragrant with the perfume of life, so that he who reads may acquire sweetness and not rush into danger to his own destruction. Read with simplicity, man; I would not encourage you, a misdirected interpreter, to dig up meanings for yourself. The language is simple: 'God created heaven and earth.' He created what was not, not what was. And the earth was invisible, because water flowed over it and covered it. Darkness was diffused over it, because there was not yet the light of day, or the rays of the sun which can reveal even what lies hid beneath the waters.

Why, then, do they say that God created evil, although from principles contrary and opposed nothing whatsoever is generated? Light does not generate death nor does light give birth to darkness. And the processes of generation are not like the mutability of human emotions. The latter change from one opposite principle to another according to the various questions at issue. The former are not deflected from one point to its opposite, but, being created either by their authors or by causes of the same nature, they stand in a similar relationship to their Creator.

(31) What, then, are we to say? If evil has no beginning,

<sup>11</sup> Ps. 33.15.

<sup>12</sup> See P. de Labriolle, *Histoire de la littérature latine chrétienne* (Paris 1920) 120.

as if uncreated or not made by God, from what source did nature derive it? Because no rational being has denied that evil exists in a world like this in which accident and death are so frequent. Yet from what we have already said we can gather that evil is not a living substance, but is a deviation of mind and soul away from the path of true virtue, a deviation which frequently steals upon the souls of the unaware. The greater danger is not, therefore, from what is external to us, but from our own selves. Our adversary is within us, within us is the author of error, locked, I say, within our very selves. Look closely on your intentions; explore the disposition of your mind; set up guards to watch over the thoughts of your mind and the cupidities of your heart. You yourself are the cause of your wickedness; you yourself are the leader of your own crimes and the instigator of your own misdeeds. Why do you summon an alien nature to furnish an excuse for your sins?

Would that you did not give rein to yourself; would that you did not rush recklessly on; would that neither by immoderate desires nor through wrath or cupidity you involved yourself in bonds which trap us like so many nets. And surely it is in our power to moderate our desires; to curb our anger; to check our evil passions. It is also within our power to give ourselves up to luxurious living; to add fire to our lusts; to stir up the fires of our anger or lend our ears to one who ministers to them; to be unduly puffed up by pride; to allow ourselves to be carried away by acts of cruelty rather than that we should bend ourselves to humble deeds and find delight in acts of kindliness.

Why, then, man, do you accuse nature? Nature has old age and illness which serve as so many impediments to our lives. But old age becomes sweeter and more useful by its wise counsels and characters. It becomes more ready to face inevitable death with constancy and becomes more heroic

in quelling lusts of the flesh.<sup>13</sup> Infirmary of the body, too, is conducive to sobriety of mind. Hence the Apostle says: 'When I am weak, then am I strong.' Accordingly, he gloried not in his virtues but in his infirmities. A divine saying also flashes forth from that salutary oracle: 'Strength is made perfect in weakness.'<sup>14</sup> We ought to guard ourselves against the 'sins of youth'<sup>15</sup> which arise from free acts of our will, and we should avoid the irrational passions of the body. Let us not search outside of ourselves or attribute to others the causes of that of which we ourselves are sole masters. Let us, rather, recognize these causes as belonging to us alone. We ought to attribute to ourselves the choice of an evil which we are unable to do without consent of the will rather than ascribe the same to others. In the courts of the world guilt so is imputed and punishment meted out, not to those compelled to crime by necessity, but to those who have acted voluntarily. It is true that the person who in a rage slays another is subject to the penalty of death. Why, even according to the decree of the divine law itself, a person who inadvertently kills another may expect impunity by accepting the possibility of exile, if he wishes to escape punishment.<sup>16</sup>

This, then, may be stated on the question of what in the real sense of the word seems to be evil. Wrong does not exist except when the mind and conscience are implicated and bound up with the guilt. Moreover, no intelligent person would call poverty, disgrace, or death an evil. He would not list them in the category of evils, because they are not the opposite of those goods held in the highest esteem—goods which seem to fall to our lot either from causes which stem from nature or from the favorable circumstance of our lives.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Cicero, *De senectute* 14.47.

<sup>14</sup> 2' Cor. 12.10,9.

<sup>15</sup> Ps. 24.7.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Num. 35.22-25.



(32) Not without a purpose have we introduced this digression in order to prove that the phrase 'darkness and the abyss' should be taken in literal sense. In fact, the darkness under discussion comes especially from the shadow cast from the heavens, since every body produces a shadow by which it casts a shade either on what is near by or on what is beneath it, and above it casts a shadow on those objects which it seems to cover or include. The firmament of the heavens does include the earth, because, as we have shown above, heaven stretches itself out like a vault. Therefore, darkness was not an original substance, but the mist of darkness accompanied like a shadow the body of the world. Accordingly, at the instant that the world arose at the divine command there was enclosed within it a shadow. Just as if a person in the midst of a plain illumined by the midday sun were, at the spur of the moment, to hedge some spot and cover it with thick leafy branches, would not his hut with its rude, stage-like background become rather all the more obscure within in contrast to the exterior, so brilliantly illuminated?<sup>17</sup> Or why was a place closed on all sides called a cave unless it is that it is a place obscured by darkness and forbidding because of its blackness?<sup>18</sup>

This darkness then was over the abyss of waters. For the Gospel teaches us that the abyss is a mass of deep waters, where, in fact, the demons entreated the Saviour 'not to command them to depart into the abyss.' But He who taught that the will of the demons should not be obeyed caused them to enter into the bodies of swine. And the herd of swine rushed down the cliff into the pool, so that the demons did not escape what they rebelled against, but were, as they

17 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.164,165, and the note of Servius (*editio Harvardiana* 1946, 95) on *scaena* ('stage').

18 *Antrum—atro situ.*



deserved, submerged in the depths.<sup>19</sup> Unformed, therefore, was the appearance and shape of this world.

### *Chapter 9*

(33) 'And the Spirit of God,' he said, 'moved over the waters. And God said: Be light made.'<sup>1</sup> Rightly, therefore, was the Spirit of God sent forth where the divine operation was to begin. He said: 'Be light made.' Whence should the voice of God in Scripture begin, if not with light? Whence should the adornment of the world take its beginning, if not from light?

There would be no purpose in the world if it were not seen. In fact, God Himself was in the light, because He 'dwells in light inaccessible,' and He 'was the true light that enlightens every man who comes into this world.'<sup>2</sup> But He wishes the light to be such as might be perceived by mortal eyes. The person who desires to erect a house as a fitting habitation for the head of a family determines first how it may receive light abundantly before he lays the foundation. This is the first requisite. If this is lacking, the whole house is without beauty and is uninhabitable. It is light which sets off the other beautiful objects in the house.

'Let light be made,' He said. When the word 'light' is used, it is not intended to mean merely the preparation for performance; rather, it is the splendor of the operation itself in action. The Fabricator of nature uttered the word 'light' and also created it. The Word of God is His will; the work of God is nature. He created light and illumined the dark-

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Luke 8.31,32.

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.2,3.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. 6.16; John 1.9.

ness. 'And God said, be light made, and light was made.'<sup>3</sup> He did not speak in order that action should follow; rather, the action was completed with the Word. Hence, David appropriately uttered the statement, 'He spoke and they were made,'<sup>4</sup> because the fulfillment of the act accompanied the Word.

God, therefore, is the Author of light and the place and cause of darkness is the world. But the good Author uttered the word 'light' so that He might reveal the world by infusing brightness therein and thus make its aspect beautiful. Suddenly, then, the air became bright and darkness shrank in terror from the brilliance of the novel brightness. The brilliance of the light which suddenly permeated the whole universe overwhelmed the darkness and, as it were, plunged it into the abyss. Fittingly, therefore, and appropriately was it said: 'Light was made.' For, just as light quickly illuminated the heavens, the earth, and the seas, and in a moment, without our being aware of it, when the land is unveiled at the splendor of dawn, this light is perceived as it encompasses us, in such a manner should its birth be explained. Why do we marvel at the fact that God simply said 'light' and flashed forth brilliance on a darkling world, when we know that, if a person immersed in water should emit oil from his mouth, all that which is hidden in the deep is made clearer?

God did not speak as one would utter a sound through the vocal organs or as a movement of the tongue might produce an exhortation from heaven or as a sound of words might strike this air of ours. His purpose was to reveal the knowledge of His will by the effects of His work.

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<sup>3</sup> Gen. 1.3.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 148.5.

(34) 'And He divided the light from the darkness and God saw the light that it was good.'<sup>5</sup> He spoke, and no one heard the sound of His voice. He divided, and no one noticed the effort expended in His work. He saw, and no one observed the glance of His eyes. 'And God saw,' he says, 'the light that it was good.' He did not see that of which He had no knowledge, nor did He approve what He before had neither known nor seen. It is a fitting quality of good works that they need no one to applaud them outside of oneself, but when they are seen give evidence of their own intrinsic value. It is more important that one be approved in the sight of men rather than be lauded in their conversation, since such a person relies on his own testimony and not on the recommendations of others.

But if in our own experience we are able to perceive by means of our eyes, by the aid of which the beauty of natural objects is immediately appreciated, how much more is this true in the case of God! He sees all things which He approves and approves of all things which He sees, according to the Scriptures: 'The eyes of the Lord are upon the just.'<sup>6</sup> The nature of light is of such a kind that its value does not rest in number or measurement or weight as is the case with other things. Its whole value comes from its appearance. Accordingly, Scripture fittingly described the nature of light, which pleases us when seen, inasmuch as it furnishes us with the ability to see. Not undeservingly was light able to find as its eulogist one who first justly praised it, since it was also responsible for making the other objects in the world worthy of commendation. God, therefore, saw the light and illumined it with His countenance and saw that it was good. And this is a conviction not only on the part of God, but of all mankind. And so the value of light

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<sup>5</sup> Gen. 1.4.

<sup>6</sup> Ps. 33.16.

is conceded to be great, not only because of its splendor, but also on account of its usefulness. For this reason there was a division made between light and darkness, so that, when separated, there would seem to be no grounds for confusing the nature of light and the nature of darkness.

(35) 'And God called the light, day, and the darkness, night,'<sup>7</sup> in order that day and night might be distinguished even in name. For this reason we notice that the rising of light rather than that of the sun seems to open the day. The beginning of day closes up night's exit and a definite time limit and an established boundary seem to have been prescribed for night and day. The sun gives the day its brilliance; the light, its existence. The sky is often overlaid with clouds, so that the sun is hidden and its rays are not seen. Still, the presence of light points to the fact that it is day and that darkness has vanished.

### *Chapter 10*

(36) 'And there was made evening and morning, one day.'<sup>1</sup> Some inquire why Scripture first mentions evening and after that, morning? Would not this appear to mean that night came before day? They do not notice that this is preceded by a reference to day: 'And God called light, day, and the darkness, night,' and then, again, because the evening is the termination of day and morning is the termination of night.

Therefore, in order to give preference and primacy to the day of creation, Scripture first indicated the end of a day, which night was soon to follow, and then it added the

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<sup>7</sup> Gen. 1.5.

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.5.

termination of night. There is a further reason why Scripture could not prefer night to day: It included in the term 'day' the space of time for both day and night and bestowed on that term the prestige, as it were, of a principal name. And this usage is found in Scripture to confer a name on the more important element. This is proved by numerous examples, for Jacob has said also: 'The days of my life have been short and wretched.'<sup>2</sup> And again: 'All the days of my life.'<sup>3</sup> And David set down: 'The days of my years';<sup>4</sup> he did not say also 'the night.' Hence we note that those events which are now recorded in the form of history have established for themselves a precedent for the relation of future events.

The beginning of the day rests on God's word: 'Be light made, and light was made.'<sup>5</sup> The end of day is the evening. Now, the succeeding day follows after the termination of night. The thought of God is clear. First He called light 'day' and next He called darkness 'night.'

(37) In notable fashion has Scripture spoken of a 'day,' not the 'first day.' Because a second, then a third, day, and finally the remaining days were to follow, a 'first day' could have been mentioned, following in this way the natural order.<sup>6</sup> But Scripture established a law that twenty-four hours, including both day and night, should be given the name of day only, as if one were to say the length of one day is twenty-four hours in extent. In such fashion, also, is the generation of men reckoned which is understood to include that of women, also. Because what is secondary is bound up with what is primary, the nights in this reckoning are considered to be component parts of the days that are counted.

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<sup>2</sup> Gen. 47.9.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 22.6.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 89.10.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 1.5.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Philo, *De opificio mundi* 5 (*Philonis opera*, ed. L. Cohn, I).

Therefore, just as there is a single revolution of time, so there is but one day. There are many who call even a week one day, because it returns to itself, just as one days does, and one might say seven times revolves back on itself. This is the form of a circle, to begin with itself and to return to itself. Hence, Scripture speaks at times of an age of the world. Although in other passages there is a mention of an age, there Scripture seems to mean the diversities in public and private affairs: 'For the day of the Lord is great and glorious.'<sup>7</sup> And elsewhere: 'What avail is it to you to seek the day of the Lord.'<sup>8</sup> And here is meant darkness and not light, for it is clear that that day when innocence will gleam forth and guilt be tormented is dark to those who are conscious of evil deeds and unworthy acts. Moreover, Scripture teaches us that the everlasting day of eternal reward is to be one in which there is no interchange or intermission of day and night.

(38) Fittingly, then, in calling one day the interchange of both times Scripture closes this period with morning, so that we are taught that day begins with light and in light comes to an end. This is true because day and night could not be considered as a unit of time unless that time has been completely traversed. Hence, 'let us walk becomingly as in the day' and 'let us lay aside the works of darkness.'<sup>9</sup> We know that night is passed in sleep and forgetfulness so that the body may find rest. Night is not designed for the performance of any task or of any transaction. Let us not be sharers in feasting and drunkenness, in chambering and immodesty. Let us not say: Darkness and walls cover us and who knows if the Most High will see us.<sup>10</sup> But let there be

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<sup>7</sup> Joel 2.11.

<sup>8</sup> Amos 5.18.

<sup>9</sup> Rom. 13.12,13.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Eccli. 23.26.



in us a love of light and an esteem of goodness, so that, as if walking in daylight, we may desire that our works shine in the presence of God. To Him be honor, praise, glory, and power, together with our Lord Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit, from eternity and now and always, for ever and ever. Amen.<sup>11</sup>


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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Matt. 5.16.

## BOOK TWO: THE SECOND DAY

### THE THIRD HOMILY

#### *Chapter 1*

E HAVE FINISHED as best we could our discussion of the first day—or, rather, of one day, in order to keep to the phrase preferred by the inspired book. On this day, by the work of the omnipotent God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, we know that the heavens were founded, the earth was created, the waters and the air were sent forth around us, and a separation was made between light and darkness.

Who, therefore, does not marvel at the fact that a world formed of dissimilar elements should rise to the level of unity in one body, that this body should combine by indissoluble laws of concord and love to link together and form a union of such discordant elements? Furthermore, who does not marvel that these elements so naturally separate should be tied together in the bonds of unity and peace as if by an indivisible compact? Or who in a moment of weak-

ness would, on beholding this, question the possibilities of order or plans? All these elements a divine power incomprehensible to human minds and incapable of being expressed in our language has by the might of His will woven closely together.

(2) God, therefore, created the heavens and the earth and those things which He as Author has ordained to exist, not just as a designer of their form but as a Creator of their nature. How, in fact, can the creative power of God which is impassive and the nature of matter which is passive form an agreement together, as if one borrowed from the other what was lacking in each? If matter is uncreated, then God is without the power to create matter and must borrow from matter what is a conditional basis for His work. If, however, matter is unformed, it surely is remarkable that such material, co-eternal with God, which has not received from the Creator its substance, but has itself possessed it in timeless existence, has been unable to bestow beauty on itself. The Creator of all things, therefore, would have found ready for His work more things than He contributed to it. He would have found material on which to work and would have merely bestowed the form which would confer beauty on what has already been found.

Hence, such a day should be distinguished from the others as 'one day,' and should not be compared with other days as 'the first day,' for on it the foundations of all things were laid and there began to come into existence the causes of all things on which the substance of this world and of the entire visible creation is based. Wherefore, our discourse can now proceed to the wonderful works of the second day. The importance of these works should not be rated by what we have achieved in our discussion, but should, in accordance with Scripture, be referred to the praise of the Creator.

(3) I bid you, therefore, be considerate enough to regard

in a natural sense our plausible discourse and to weigh our statements in simplicity of mind and with attentive intellect, not following the traditions of philosophy nor those who gather the semblance of truth in the 'vain deceit'<sup>1</sup> of the arts of persuasion, but in accordance with the rule of truth, which is set forth in the inspired words of God and is poured into the hearts of the faithful by the contemplation of such sublimity. For it is written: 'Strengthen thou me in thy words.' 'The wicked have told me fables but not as thy law, O Lord. All thy statutes are truth.'<sup>2</sup> Therefore, not the nature of the elements, but Christ Himself, who created the world in the abundance and plenitude of His divinity, should be our standard in the examination of what was created and in the question as to what natural power is able to achieve. The people who beheld with their own eyes the miracles related in the Gospel of the healing of the leper and that of giving sight to the blind did not regard these as a medical process, but rather, marveling at the power of the Lord, 'gave praise to God,' as it is written.<sup>3</sup> Moses did not follow the calculations of the Egyptians and the conjunctions of the stars and the relations of the elements when he stretched out his hand to divide the Red Sea, but was complying with the commands of divine power. Hence, he says himself: 'Thy right hand, O Lord, is magnified in strength. Thy right hand, O Lord, hath broken the enemy.'<sup>4</sup> To Him, therefore, ye faithful people, lift up your mind and bring to Him all your heart. God does not see as man does: God sees with His mind; man sees with his countenance. Therefore, man does not see as God does. Give ear to what God saw and what He praised. Do not, therefore, estimate

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1 Col. 2.8; Eph. 5.6.

2 Ps. 118.28,85,86.

3 Matt. 8.2; 9.30; Luke 18.43.

4 Exod. 15.6.

with your eyes nor weigh with your mind the problem of creation. Rather, you should not regard as a subject for debate what God saw and approved of.

## *Chapter 2*

(4) And God said: 'Let there be a firmament made amidst the waters and let it divide the waters from the waters, and it was so.'<sup>1</sup> Listen to the words of God: 'Let there be,' He said. This is the word of a commander, not of an adviser. He gives orders to nature and does not comply with its power. He does not regard its measurements, nor does He examine its weight. His will is the measure of things and His word is the completion of the work. 'Let there be a firmament made amidst the waters,' He said. Firm is everything which God has established. Appropriately enough has He stated: 'Let there be a firmament made' before He added 'amidst the waters,' in order that you might first believe that the firmament was made by God's command before you would begin to doubt about the problem of the fluid nature of water. If the nature of the elements is taken into consideration, how it is possible for the firmament to be stable between the waters? The one is liquid, the other solid; one is active, the other, passive. 'And let it divide the waters from the waters,' He said. But water usually mingles, not separates. How, then, does He command what He knows to be a contradiction in terms of the first principles of the elements? But, since His word is nature's birth, justly therefore does He who gave nature its origin presume to give nature its law.

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.6.

(5) But first let us discuss the problem of the nature of the firmament, whether it is the same as what God previously called heaven or something different? The question also arises whether there are two heavens or more. There are some who say that there is but one heaven. Moreover, they maintain, since there was only one ὕλη, as they call it, that there could not be at hand material for making a second heaven. Moreover, since this material had been already consumed in the first heaven, there would be nothing left over in their opinion which would furnish material for a second or third heaven. On the other hand, an opinion that there are countless heavens is held by others,<sup>2</sup> who thereby furnish an occasion for laughter to some members of their own school (contending among themselves even more than they do with us), who pretend to prove by mathematical means and the law of necessity that another heaven could not exist. Again, they maintain that nature could not allow that a second or a third such entity should exist and it would not be a fitting exercise of power for a Creator to bring into existence many heavens.

And who would not find the crafty and eloquent phrases of these men a subject of ridicule? They would not deny the human capacity of making more objects of the same kind from one and the same material, yet they doubt whether the Creator of all things can make more heavens, of whom it is written: 'But the Lord made the heavens,' and elsewhere: 'He hath done all things whatsoever he would.'<sup>3</sup> Why is it difficult for one whose wishes are acts? Their theory that this impossibility exists is, therefore, unsubstantial when they treat of God, of whom in truth it is said: 'Nothing is impossible to thee.'<sup>4</sup>

2 Cf. Cicero, *Academica* 2.55 (Democritus).

3 Ps. 95.5; 113.3.

4 Mark 14.36.



(6) Accordingly, we cannot deny the existence of not only a second heaven, but also of a third, since the Apostle attests in his writings that he 'was caught up to the third heaven.'<sup>5</sup> David, too, introduced 'Heaven of heavens' into the chorus of those who give praise to God. In imitation of him philosophers introduced the harmonious movement of five constellations along with the sun and moon, to whose spheres or, rather, round bodies they state that all things are connected.<sup>6</sup> They consider that these bodies, bound together and, as it were, linked one with the other, are borne in a backward motion and one contrary to the rest of things. By the impact and motion of these spheres there is produced a tone full of sweetness, the fruit of consummate art and of most delightful modulation, inasmuch as the air, torn apart by such artful motion, combines in even and melodious fashion high and low notes to such a degree that it surpasses in sweetness any other musical composition.

(7) If you should inquire into the truth of this phenomenon and demand that proof be presented to our senses and to our hearing, these philosophers are embarrassed. For, if what they say were true, how is it possible that we who are accustomed to hear lesser sounds do not perceive the impact of the movement of the sphere? This takes place, according to their theory, when in the course of the sphere's motion the celestial sphere, to which the course of the constellations is uninterruptedly attached, produces by its swifter motion a high tone, while the lunar sphere gives us a deeper tone. If, then, we demand a proof of that hypothesis from the evidence of our sense of hearing, they report that our ears have become deafened and our sense of hearing has become dulled because we have become accustomed to that sound from the first moment of our birth. And they present an illustration from the river Nile, the mightiest of rivers. In that

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<sup>5</sup> 2 Cor. 12.2.

<sup>6</sup> Pythagoras and his school; cf. Cicero, *Somnium Scipionis* 6.17.

place where that river flows precipitously from the highest mountains into the Cataracts, the noise of the waterfall is so great that the ears of the natives are affected to the extent that they are said to be deaf.

But experience itself presents us an easy rebuttal to their arguments. We are able to hear thunderbolts produced by the collision of clouds; how, then, are we unable to hear the revolution of such mighty spheres which, in proportion surely to their swifter motion, should produce sounds all the more resounding? They maintain, furthermore, that such music does not reach the earth. Otherwise, men, captivated by the sweetness and charm which that exceedingly swift motion of the heavens produces, would from the regions of the east as far as the west have abandoned all their occupations and labors. Thus, everything here would be in a state of inactivity as a result of what might be called the rapture of men at the sound of celestial music. But subjects which are alien to our purpose and to divine testimony should be left to those 'who are outside.'<sup>7</sup> We should adhere closely to the doctrine laid down by the celestial Scriptures.

### *Chapter 3*

(8) Our argument, then, is based on the word of God: 'Let there be a firmament made amidst the waters and let it divide the waters from the waters.'<sup>1</sup> And from this arises the question whether He calls the firmament the heaven which He had already created, concerning which it is written: 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth.'<sup>2</sup> I am not unaware of the interpretation which some have held on this

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. 5.12,13; Col. 4.5; 1 Tim. 3.7.

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.6.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 1:1.

subject, namely, that as the creation at the hands of God and the foundation of heaven has been before expressly stated by Scripture, so a clearer exposition of the work of creation is here given. Whereas in one place a summary of the work, as it were, is briefly stated, in the other, the nature of the operation is depicted according to the specific aspect of things as they appear at the same moment of creation. But there is something which needs our consideration: there is question of another word for heaven, 'firmament,' and there emerges an aspect and condition of more solid character, to which is added the person of a co-operating agent. For it is written: 'And God divided the waters that were under the firmament from those that were above the firmament.'<sup>3</sup>

(9) And first of all these interpreters wish to destroy the profound impressions which frequent reading of the Scriptures have made in our mind, maintaining that waters cannot exist above the heavens. That heavenly sphere, they say, is round, with the earth in the middle of it; hence, water cannot stay on that circular surface, from which it needs must flow easily away, falling from a higher to a lower position. For how, they say, can water remain on a sphere when the sphere itself revolves?

This is one of those sophistical arguments of the subtlest kind. Grant me an opportunity to reply. If it is not granted, there need be no further room for discussion.

They ask us to concede to them that heaven turns on its axis with a swift motion, while the sphere of the earth remains motionless, so as to conclude that waters cannot stay above the heavens, because the axis of heaven as it revolved would cause these to flow off. They wish, in fact, that we grant them their premise and that our reply be based on their beliefs. In this way they would avoid the question

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<sup>3</sup> Gen. 1.7.

of the existence of length and breadth in that height and depth,<sup>4</sup> a fact which no one can comprehend except Him who is filled 'with the fullness of the Godhead,'<sup>5</sup> as the Apostle says. For who can easily set himself up to be a judge of God's work? There exists, therefore, breadth in the very heights of heaven.

To speak of matters within our knowledge, there are a great many buildings which are round in the exterior but are square-shaped within, and vice-versa. These buildings have level places on top, where water usually collects. We are led to mention these matters in order to draw the attention of these interpreters to the fact that their opinions can be confuted by other opinions closer to the truth and that they may cease measuring such a mighty work of God in terms of human work and merely on an estimate of our own capacities.

(10) We follow the tradition of the Scriptures and we value the work by our esteem of the Author, as to what was said, who said it, and to whom it was said. 'Let there be a firmament made,' He said, 'amidst the waters and let it divide the waters from the waters.'<sup>6</sup> From this I learn that the firmament is made by a command by which the water was to be separated and the water above be divided from the water below. What is clearer than this?

He who commanded the waters to be separated by the interposition of the firmament lying between them provided also the manner of their remaining in position, once they were divided and separated. The word of God gives nature its power and an enduring quality to its matter, as long as He who established it wishes it to be so, as it is written: 'He hath established them forever and for ages of ages. He hath made a decree and it shall not pass away.' And that you may

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Eph. 3.18.

<sup>5</sup> Col. 2.9.

know that He said this concerning these waters which you say cannot exist in the higher parts of the heavens, listen to the words which precede: 'Praise him, ye heaven of heavens, and let all the waters above the heavens praise the name of the Lord.'<sup>7</sup>

Did He not speak to you in such a way as to answer your objections? 'For he spoke and they were made. He commanded and they were created. He hath established them forever and for ages of ages. He hath made a decree and it shall not pass away.'<sup>8</sup> Does He not seem to you to be one who is fitted to give a law to His work? Here speaks to you a God venerable by nature, inestimable in magnitude, in rewards immeasurable, in His works incomprehensible, the depth of whose wisdom who can ever strive to measure?<sup>9</sup> But He speaks to His Son, that is, to His arm; He speaks to His power; He speaks to His wisdom, to His justice. And the Son acts as one who is powerful; He acts as the power of God; He acts as the wisdom of God, as divine justice. When you hear this, why do you marvel if, by the operation of such majesty, water can be held suspended above the celestial firmament?

(11) Reflect on this when dealing with other matters, with what is seen by the eyes of men—reflect on this if you look for an explanation of how the sea divided at the crossing of the Jews. This is not a customary act of nature that water should separate itself from water and that the waters intermingling in the midst of the earth should be divided. The waves became solid, we are told, and like the waters in the firmament they checked their course when they reached their unusual boundaries.<sup>10</sup> Could not the Lord have set

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6 Gen. 1.6.

7 Ps. 148.6,4.

8 Ps. 148.5,6.

9 Cf. Rom. 11.33.

10 Cf. Exod. 15.8.



free the Hebrew people in a quite different manner? But He wished to show that by taking note of such a spectacle you might come to think that what is not even visible to your eyes ought to inspire belief. The Jordan, too, inverting its course, returned to its source.<sup>11</sup> That water in its course should stand still is considered to be unusual. That it should flow upwards without any external aid is considered to be impossible. But why is it impossible for Him who gave strength to the weak, so that they could say: 'I can do all things in him who strengthens me.'<sup>12</sup>

Let them tell us whether, when 'the air thickens into cloud,'<sup>13</sup> rain is then produced by clouds or whether it is collected in the lap of the clouds? We so frequently see clouds issuing from the mountains. I ask you: Does the water rise from the earth or does the water which is over the heavens fall in copious rain? If water rises, it surely is against nature that the element which is heavier should be borne to a higher place and that it should be carried there by air, although this is a lighter element. Or if water is whirled by the rapid motion of the entire world system, in that case it is absorbed from the lowest sphere and, likewise, it is poured forth from the highest. If it does not cease to be poured forth, as they claim, surely it does not cease to be absorbed, because, if the axis of the heavens is ever in movement, the water, too, is always being absorbed. If water descends, then it is clear that it is continuously above the heavens in a position from which it can flow downwards.

What prevents us, then, from admitting that water is suspended above the heavens? How can they say that the earth, although it is certainly heavier than water, stays suspended and immobile in the middle? Following the same

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ps. 113.3.

<sup>12</sup> Phil. 4.13.

<sup>13</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* 5.20.



principle, they can admit the water which is above the heavens does not descend because of the rotation of that celestial sphere. Just as the earth is suspended in the void and stays immobile in position, its weight being balanced on every side,<sup>14</sup> in like manner the water, too, is balanced by weights either equal to or greater than that of the earth. For the same reason, the sea does not tend to inundate the land without a special command to do so.

(12) When they state again that the glittering sphere of heaven revolves with its fiery stars, did not Divine Providence necessarily foresee that water more than sufficient to temper the heat of the burning axis should exist within the sphere of heaven and above it? For the reason that fire makes its presence felt everywhere, for the same reason, too, water abounded on the earth, lest it be parched by the heat of the burning sun and of the twinkling stars and thus delicate things be injured at their birth by an unfamiliar warmth.<sup>15</sup> How great a number of springs, rivers, and lakes irrigate the earth, parched, as it is, by some fire within!<sup>16</sup> If, too, that interior fire does not give life to them, how could the trees or grain germinate or seedling burst forth or, when they have sprouted, be brought to maturity? Fire, also, frequently issues forth from rocks and from wood itself when a tree is being cut down. Fire, therefore, is a necessary element in the work of creation in order that things remain in due order and arrangement and that the clemency of the sky may temper the rigidity of water. In like manner even excessive quantities of water are not superfluous, where there is danger of one element being consumed by another; unless the proportion of both elements is a suitable one, then

14 Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.12.

15 Cf. Virgil, *Eclogues* 6.33-36; *vapor* for 'warmth' is Lucretian (3.126).

16 Cf. Lucretius 5.457-466.

fire may dry up the water, just as water, too, extinguishes fire.

Accordingly, God balanced the universe with weights and measures. He has measured even the drops of rain, as we read in the book of Job.<sup>17</sup> Knowing that either there would be a tendency toward a failure or a dissolution of the universe, if one element preponderated over the other, He controlled for that reason the extent of each, so that fire would not supply more heat, or water more moisture, than would lead to the diminution of either under His guidance, by which the superfluous was drained off and a sufficiency was held in reserve.

Such great streams of mighty rivers still burst forth from the earth. We have the Nile that inundates Egypt with its overflowing waters; the Danube which divides the barbarians of the eastern regions from the Roman people, until it hides itself in the Black Sea; the Rhine which directs its course from a defile in the Alps until it reaches the depths of the ocean—a notable barricade for the Roman empire against savage nations; the Po, a trusty conveyor of maritime produce for the support of Italy; the Rhone, which with its rapid current cuts the waters of the Tyrrhenian sea, thereby adding to the perils of sailors, according to report, because of the struggle for mastery between the river currents and the sea waves; and, rising in the northern regions and combining in the Caucasus Mountains with many other streams, the Phasis River rushes headlong to the sea. It would be tedious to enumerate the names of each and every river which either flows into our sea or empties itself into the ocean. Notwithstanding such an abundance of water in the world, the soil in the southern zone for the most part is still scorched and reduced to dust by excessive heat. The toil of the unhappy farmer is spent in vain, so

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Job 36.27.

much so that, when the wells and streams are dried up, he frequently fails to find enough water to sustain life. And there will be a time when He will say to the deep: 'Be thou desolate and I will dry up all the rivers,'<sup>18</sup> as through Isaias He announced the future. But before that day established by the divine will shall come, no little conflict among themselves is presented by the specific natures of the elements. Hence, the world is frequently affected by violent inundations or is afflicted by the extremes of heat and aridity.

(13) Be not concerned, therefore, with the extraordinary excess of water in the world; take note, rather, of the force exercised by heat and you will not be incredulous. Fire is able to absorb much, a fact which ought to be clear to us from an experiment. When physicians burn a small candle and attach it to the inside of certain types of vases, narrow in the spout, rather flat on top and hollow within, how does it happen that this heat attracts to itself all the moisture? Who, therefore, doubts that the burning æther, glowing with mighty heat, would cause everything to be consumed by fire if it were not held in check by a law laid down by its Author, so that neither rivers nor lakes nor the seas themselves could subdue its strength? And so, water falling from above gushes forth generally in such storms of rain that rivers and lakes suddenly are filled and the very seas overflow. Hence, we often see the sun, too, veiled in vaporous exhalations. This is clear proof that the sun, in order to temper its heat, has appropriated to itself the element of water.

(14) So great is their zeal in assailing truth that they go as far as to assert that the sun itself is devoid of heat by nature, for the reason that it is white and not ruddy or red as fire is. And so they say it is not fiery by nature and, if

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<sup>18</sup> Isa. 44.27.

it has some heat, they maintain that this is the result of the unusual speed of its revolutions. This theory ought to be accepted, they claim, for the reason that the sun does not seem to consume any moisture, because it does not have a natural heat by means of which moisture is either diminished or very often drained off. Notwithstanding these arguments they do not succeed in their purpose, because it makes no difference whether heat is natural or acquired or proceeds from some other cause, since every fire is a consumer of moisture or of any material such as can be burned by the application of fire. For, if you touch leaves with a spark obtained, not from wood which is already partly burned, but from one produced by the friction of sticks, such a flame increases its strength, just as if you were to light a torch from a fire. But if you should kindle a light from a flame or another lighted object, these two have a fire of the same appearance and character as if the fire were produced, not by nature, but by accident.<sup>19</sup> These men should, from the point of view, at least, of the heat of the sun, take note that God has set different times and places for the sun's courses, lest, if it should linger always in the same places, it might burn them up with its daily heat. Concerning the reasons for the bitter and salty nature of sea water, the same people relate that so much water is absorbed by heat as it is obtained from the confluent rivers, and that so much water is evaporated each day by the heat as is furnished by the daily inflow from the various rivers. This phenomenon is held to take place by a certain power of selection on the part of the sun, which takes to itself what is pure and light and leaves what is heavy and earthy. As a result, there is left that salty and dry quality in the water, unsuited to man's consumption and enjoyment.

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19 Cf. Lucretius 2.1115.

*Chapter 4*

(15) But let us return to our theme: 'Let there be a firmament made amidst the water.'<sup>1</sup> Let it not disturb you, as I have already said, that above He speaks of heaven and here of a firmament, since David also says: 'The heavens narrate the glory of God and the firmament declareth the work of his hands.'<sup>2</sup> That is to say, the created world, when one beholds it, praises its own Author, for His invisible majesty is recognized through the things that are visible.<sup>3</sup> It seems to me that the word 'heaven' is a generic term, because Scripture testifies to the existence of very many heavens. The word 'firmament' is more specific, since here also we read: 'And he called the firmament, heaven.'<sup>4</sup> In a general way, He would seem to have said above that heaven was made in the beginning so as to take in the entire fabric of celestial creation, and that here the specific solidity of this exterior firmament is meant. This is called the firmament of heaven, as we read in the prophetic hymn, 'Blessed are thou in the firmament of heaven.'<sup>5</sup>

For heaven, which in Greek is called οὐρανός, in Latin, *caelum*, is connected with the word 'stamped' [*caelatum*], because the heavens have the lights of the stars impressed on them like embossed work, just as silver plate is said to be 'stamped' when it glitters with figures in relief. The word οὐρανός seems to be derived from the Greek verb 'to be seen' [ὀρᾶσθαι]. In distinction, therefore, to the earth, which is darker, the sky is called οὐρανός, because it is bright, that is to say, visible. Hence, I believe, is the origin

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1 Gen. 1.6.

2 Ps. 18.2.

3 Cf.. Rom. 1.20.

4 Gen. 1.8.

5 Dan. 3.56.

of that expression: 'The winged ones of heaven always behold the face of my Father, who is in heaven.'<sup>6</sup> And again: 'The winged fowl above the firmament of heaven.'<sup>7</sup> The powers which exist in that visible place behold all these things and have them subject to their observation.

(16) Therefore, the heavens were closed in the times of Elias when godlessness reigned with Achab and Jezabel,<sup>8</sup> since the people were made responsible for the sacrilege of their kings. For that reason, no one attempted to raise his eyes to heaven, no one paid reverence to his Creator, but, rather, worshiped sticks and stones. How do we come to this conclusion? Because in His maledictions against the people of Israel God said: 'The heaven that is over thee will be of brass and your soil of iron,'<sup>9</sup> when paying the price of godlessness, the people of Juda were punished by the inclemency of heaven and the sterility of earth—for heaven is the source of fertility. Therefore, Moses, too, granted this blessing to the tribe of Joseph: 'From the confines of heaven and from the dew and from the deep that lieth beneath and from the course of the sun in accordance with the season and from the months that meet and from the tops of the mountains and the eternal hills.'<sup>10</sup> For it is true that the fruitfulness of the earth is sustained by heavenly guidance.

Hence, the sky which gives forth no moisture at a time when no showers break through the clouds has the appearance of iron. The sky is also of 'iron' when the air is dark and dense, with clouds of the color of iron rust, at a time when the earth is held in bonds by the rigidity of cold. Then moisture seems to be suspended over our heads and to be ready to fall at any moment. Frequently, too, water is

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6 Matt. 18.10.

7 Gen. 1.20.

8 Cf. 3 Kings 17.1.

10 Deut. 33.13-15.



solidified in the form of snow when subjected to icy winds at a time when snow falls through the cleft air.

This firmament cannot be broken, you see, without a noise. It also is called a firmament because it is not weak nor without resistance. Hence, in dealing with thunderbolts, which give forth a tremendous crash when currents of air on the point of arising in the midst of the clouds meet together in collision, the Scripture speaks of strengthening the thunderbolt.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the firmament is called because of its firmness or because it has been made firm by divine power, just as Scripture teaches us, saying: 'Praise ye him in the firmament of his power.'<sup>12</sup>

(17) And I am not unaware that some refer 'the heaven of heavens' to the intelligible powers, the firmament to the efficient powers and that the heavens praise and 'shine forth the glory of God and the firmament declareth it'<sup>13</sup>—yet, as we have said above, they declare them not as spiritual powers, but as things of the world. Others also interpret the waters to mean the purificatory powers. We accept this interpretation as a simple adornment to our treatise. To us, however, it does not appear to be inappropriate nor absurd, if we are to understand these to be real waters for the reasons given above. According to the hymn of the Prophet, dew, frost, cold and heat bless the Lord, the earth, too, blesses Him.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, we do not understand the stars to be unseen powers of nature, but as having real existence. Even dragons give praise to the Lord, because their nature and aspect, if one examines them closely, are not without presenting a certain modicum of beauty and design.

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Amos 4.13.

<sup>12</sup> Ps. 150. 1.

<sup>13</sup> Ps. 148.4.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Dan. 3.64,65.

*Chapter 5*

(18) 'And God saw that it was good.'<sup>1</sup> The Son does what the Father desires. No degeneration of nature is found in Him whose work does not degenerate from the will of the Father. He saw, it is certain, but not with corporeal eyes. He designated that the limit of vision should conform to the plenitude of His grace,<sup>2</sup> by which means His judgment may be made known to us, for we in fact often dispute even on subjects which are divine.

What wonder is it, then, if those men who are able to turn their attention to the work of creation also raise questions on the generation of the Creator Himself. Him they call to judgment; Him they dare refer to as unjust and unworthy of His descent. And so you read both 'God spoke' and 'God created,' in which both Father and Son are honored with the same name of majesty. 'And God saw that it was good.' He spoke as if speaking to one who knew all the wishes of His Father. He saw as if He knew all that His Son had accomplished, acting with Him in community of operation.

(19) 'He saw that it was good.' He did not, of course, recognize that of which He was ignorant. Rather, His approval was given to what gave Him pleasure. The work did not please Him as something unknown, just as the Father, who was pleased with the Son, was not like one unknown, as it is written: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'<sup>3</sup> The Son always knows the will of the Father and the Father that of the Son. And the Son listens to the Father and the Father hears the Son through the unity of nature, will, and substance. The Son, therefore, bears witness to this

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.10.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. John 1.14.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 3.17.

in the Gospel, speaking to the Father: 'I know that thou always hearest me.'<sup>4</sup>

The Son is 'the image of the invisible God.'<sup>5</sup> All that the Father is, the Son sets forth as an image. The Father illumines and makes Him manifest for us all as 'the brightness of his glory.'<sup>6</sup> The Son, too, beholds the work of the Father and the Father that of the Son, as the Lord Himself has declared: 'The Son can do nothing of himself but only what he sees the Father doing.'<sup>7</sup> He sees, therefore, the Father doing and sees and hears Him in like manner through the hidden power of His invisible nature. Therefore, He says: As I hear, so do I judge, and 'my judgment is true, because I am not alone, but with me is he who sent me, the Father.'<sup>8</sup>

(20) This is the mystic sense. The moral sense is this: 'He saw' for me; 'He approved' for me. What God has approved, do not consider worthy of blame, since you recall that the statement, 'What God has cleansed, do not thou call common,'<sup>9</sup> has been written for you. Hence, let no one blaspheme what is good before God! If the firmament is good, how much more so is its Creator, even if the Arians would not admit it and the followers of Eunomianus should object, the no less corrupt fruit of a degenerate root!

(21) 'God saw that it was good.' Artists usually work first on individual parts and afterwards join them together with skill. Those who start to carve out of marble the features or bodies of men or mould them in bronze or wax<sup>10</sup> do not know exactly how the individual components will blend together, nor the beauty which will be the result of the final

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4 John 11.42.

5 2 Cor. 4.4.

6 Heb. 1.3.

7 John 5.19.

8 John 8.16.

9 Acts 10.15.

10 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.847,848.

work. And so they dare not praise fully, but praise only in part.

God, however, as judge of the whole work, foreseeing what is going to happen as something completed, commends that part of His work which is still in its initial stages, being already cognizant of its termination. This is not to be wondered at, since in His case the completion of a thing does not depend on the termination of the actual work. It rests, rather, on the predetermination of His will. He praises each individual part as befitting what is to come. He praises the total work, which is compounded of the elegance of each part. True beauty, in fact, consists of a fitting adjustment in each part and in the whole, so that the charm in each part and the full appropriateness of the form in the completed work are worthy of commendation.<sup>11</sup>

(22) But now let us put an end to the second day, lest, while we are attending to the work of the firmament, we may cause our hearers to languish because of the prolixity of our discourse—in a discourse which, prolonged into a night which is still devoid of the light of a moon and stars, may bring obscurity to those who are returning home. For the luminaries of the heavens have not as yet been created. Our purpose is also to allow our hearers to refresh themselves with food and drink, so that, while their minds have banqueted, the frailty of their flesh may not find cause to complain of a fast lasting even until nightfall.

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<sup>11</sup> Ancient literary criticism followed this pattern; cf. Pliny, *Epistola* 8.4; 2.5; 3.15.



## BOOK THREE: THE THIRD DAY

### THE FOURTH HOMILY

#### *Chapter 1*

N OUR DISCOURSE today, the third day rises, as it is recorded in Scripture, a notable day which freed the earth from inundation at the bidding of God: 'Let the waters that are under the heaven be gathered together into one place.'<sup>1</sup> With this fact it is my wish to begin my preface.

'Let the waters be gathered together.' These words were spoken, and the waters gathered together. It has often been said, 'let the people be gathered together,' and there was no gathering. It brings no slight blush of shame to see that the elements which are without sensibility are obedient to the command of God, whereas men to whom their Author has bestowed sensibility fail to obey His injunction. And perhaps it is the same blush of shame which has brought you here today in greater numbers. It would hardly appear right for the people to fail to congregate in the church of the Lord on the day in which water is congregated in one body.

(2) This is not the only example of the obedience of water available to us, for elsewhere we find it written: 'The waters

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.6.



saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee and they were afraid.'<sup>2</sup> What is said here of the waters does not seem to be without a semblance of truth, since elsewhere the Prophet also speaks in the same manner: 'The sea saw and fled: Jordan was turned back.'<sup>3</sup> Who does not know how in actual fact the sea fled at the crossing of the Hebrews? When the waters were divided, the people crossed over, believing because of the dust under their feet that the sea had fled, and that the waters had vanished. Therefore, the Egyptian believed what he saw and entered in, but the waters which had fled returned for him. The waters, then, know how to congregate, how to fear, and how to flee, when commanded to do so by God. Let us imitate these waters and let us recognize one congregation of the Lord, one Church.

(3) There once were gathered here waters from every valley, from every marsh, from every lake. The valley signifies heresy; the valley means the people of the Gentiles, because 'The Lord is God of the hills, but is not God of the valleys.'<sup>4</sup> Therefore, in the Church there is exultation; among the heretics and Gentiles, there is grief and weeping. Hence Scripture says: 'In the valley he set up tears.'<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, the Catholic people have congregated from every valley. Now, there are not many congregations; rather, there is one congregation, one Church. Here, too, was it said: 'Let waters be congregated from every valley,' and there came into existence a spiritual congregation, one people. Out of heretics and Gentiles has the Church become filled.

The valley is a theater, the valley is a circus where runs the horse who 'is useless for safety,'<sup>6</sup> where there is vile and

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<sup>2</sup> Ps. 76.17.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 113.3.

<sup>4</sup> 3 Kings 20.28.

<sup>5</sup> Ps. 83.7.

<sup>6</sup> Ps. 32.17.

abject contention, where there is the ignoble strife of litigants. From these, then, who used to cleave to the circus has faith grown in the Church, and daily attendance is increasing.

(4) The marsh is self-indulgence, the marsh is intemperance, the marsh is incontinence, where are found wallowing places for lusts, the grunts of beasts, and the lairs of passions. Whoever falls therein is dragged down and does not emerge. Here men's feet find no foothold, but waver uncertainly. Here water fowls are begrimed when they bathe, and above us are heard the mournful cries of doves. Here the sluggish turtle buries himself in the muddy waters. Therefore we have the sayings: 'A boar in the marsh,' 'a stag at the fountains.'<sup>7</sup> And so from every marsh, where like frogs they have sung their ancient chant of complaint, has congregated here faith; here, too, have congregated purity of heart and simplicity of mind.

(5) Waters have gathered from every lake and from every pit, so that no one prepares a pit for his brother wherein he himself may fall.<sup>8</sup> Rather, all love each other in mutual love, all cherish one the other, and support themselves as one body, although of diverse members.<sup>9</sup> They find delight not in the baleful songs sung by theatrical performers, songs which lead to sensual love, but in the chants of the Church. Here we hear the voice of the people singing in harmony the praises of God. The sight of their piety gives us pleasure. Here are people who find no delight in tapestries of purple or costly stage curtains. Their pleasure lies rather in their admiration of this most beautiful fabric of the world, this accord of unlike elements, this heaven that is 'spread out like a tent to dwell in'<sup>10</sup> to protect those who inhabit this

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ps. 79.14; 41.2.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Prov. 26.27.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Rom. 12.4.

<sup>10</sup> Isa. 40.22.

world. They find their pleasure in the earth allotted to them for their labors, in the ambient air, in the seas here enclosed in their bounds. In the people who are the instruments of the operations of God they hear music which echoes from melodious sound of God's word, within which the Spirit of God works. They see this temple here, the holy place of the Trinity, the habitation of sanctity, the holy Church, in which gleam those celestial curtains of which it is said: 'Enlarge the place of thy tents and of thy curtains; fasten, spare not, lengthen thy cords and strengthen thy stakes; stretch further on the right and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles and thou shalt inhabit the desolate cities.'<sup>11</sup> The Church, therefore, has its curtains, by which it raises aloft the good life, shields the sinner, and overshadows the fault.

(6) This is the Church, which is founded upon the seas and is prepared upon the rivers.<sup>12</sup> For the Church is made strong and is prepared above you, who flow down as rivers do from that pure source into the fountain of the world, of whom it has been said: 'The floods have lifted up, O Lord: the floods have lifted up their voices with the voice of many waters.' And the Psalmist added: 'Wonderful are the surges of the sea; wonderful is the Lord on high.'<sup>13</sup> Beneficent are the woods; you have drunk from that perennial and full spring, whither you are flowing, which says to you: 'He who believes in me' (as the Scripture says), 'from within him shall flow rivers of living water.'<sup>14</sup> He said this, however, of the Spirit, whom they who believed in him were to receive. But, like the waters of the good Jordan, return with me to the beginning.

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<sup>11</sup> Isa. 54.2,3.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Ps. 23.2.

<sup>13</sup> Ps. 92.3,4.

<sup>14</sup> John 7.38.

*Chapter 2*

(7) 'Let the waters,' Scripture says, 'that are under the heaven be gathered together into one place and let the dry land appear. And it was so done.'<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps one may not at all believe in our preceding discussion, where we have argued that the earth was invisible for the reason that it was covered with water, so that it could not be seen by corporeal eyes, for his own point of view, that is, from our condition here, did the Prophet speak—not from that of the majesty of divine nature, which, of course, sees all things. In order to point out to you that we have undertaken this laborious task, not for the sake of displaying our talents, but for your instruction, we bring as witnesses for our cause texts from Scriptures. These clearly prove that, after the gathering of the water above the earth and its later falling down into the seas, the dry land appeared. Let them cease, therefore, as far as we are concerned, to stir up contentious disputes by saying: How is the earth invisible when form and color are naturally attached to every body and every color presupposes a form?

The voice of God cries out: 'Let the waters be gathered together and let the dry land appear.' And again Scripture says: 'The waters are gathered together in one place and the dry land appeared.'<sup>2</sup> Why was there need to repeat this, if the Prophet had not thought it necessary to forestall disputes? Does he not seem to say: 'I have not said the earth was invisible according to nature, but in respect to the inundation of waters?' Hence, he added that the dry land, which before was not seen, showed itself when this covering was removed.

(8) Again, they sow the seeds of other disputes by saying:

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

If the waters were in different masses, how came it about, if these masses were in the upper regions, that the waters did not flow down to that place where, after the command given by God, they eventually arrived? For they say it is natural that waters flow of themselves into lower regions. Moreover, if these masses were below, how did it come to pass that they rose up to higher regions, a movement contrary to the nature of water? Accordingly, either this natural course did not need God's command or, notwithstanding this command, it could not succeed because it is contrary to nature.

I will gladly respond to this question, if they will first reply to me and show me that before God's command this was the nature of water, namely, flowing and falling downward. It does not have this quality from association with the other elements; it is, rather, a special quality, peculiar to itself. It is not the result of some natural propensity, but issues from the will and operation of the most high God. The waters listen to the command of God and the voice of God is the efficient cause of nature. This voice coincides with the completion of the effect of its operation. The water began to flow downwards so as to form one mass—water which before this had been spread over all the earth and had settled in numerous lurking places. I had not read of its course before, of its movements I had been uninformed: my eye had not seen, nor had my ear heard. The water stood still in diverse places; at the voice of God it was moved. Does it not seem that the voice of God gave it this natural tendency? The creature followed the injunction of its Creator and from the law proceeded custom, the law of its first constitution left its imprint for future ages.

Hence, God created day and night at the same time. Since that time, day and night continue their daily succession and renewal. The water was ordered to run together in a



mass. From that moment, water runs. Springs flow down to form rivers, rivers run into larger bodies of water;<sup>3</sup> lakes find an outlet in the seas; wave precedes wave, presses on it, and follows. There is but one way, one mass. Although the depths differ, the surface remains, however, at an equal level. Hence, too, I believe it is called '*aequor*' [level] because its surface is level.

(9) I have made my reply according to the point of view of my adversaries. Let them now answer my question: Have they ever seen springs shoot up from below? Or water rise out of the ground? Who compels it to do so? Whence does it issue forth? How is it that it does not fall? How does it happen that such deep openings spill forth water? These phenomena are in accordance with the mysterious secrets of nature. Moreover, who does not know that water frequently falls to a very low depth with a great rush and then rises up to a higher position, even to the summit of a mountain? Also, that in canals made by a craftsman's hands, the water often subsides as much as it previously had been uplifted? Accordingly, if either by its own force or by the skill of an engineer water is conducted and raised contrary to its own nature, do we wonder if by the operation of divine command it has acquired some disposition in its nature which it did not have before?

They may say now to me how God 'gathered the waters of the sea as in a vessel,' as Scripture has it, and how 'he brought forth water out of the rocks.' Could not He who brought forth water, which did not exist, out of a rock, also not guide water which already existed? 'He struck the rock,' cried David, 'and the streams overflowed,' and elsewhere, 'above the mountains shall the waters stand.'<sup>4</sup> In the Gospel we read that when there was a severe storm and the sea

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.607.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 32.7; cf. 77.16; Ps. 77.20; 103.6.



was in violent motion, so much so that the Apostles feared the dangers of shipwreck and aroused the Lord Jesus who was asleep in the stern, He arose and rebuked the wind and the sea and the tempest was abated and calm was restored.<sup>5</sup> Could not He who was able to calm the whole sea at His bidding also move the waters by His command? Well, in the account of the flood it is related that 'the fountains of the great deep were broken up' and that God afterwards caused the wind to blow over the deep so as to dry up the waters.<sup>6</sup> If these men do not wish to concede that nature obeyed and that the habitual character of an element was changed by God's command, at least they can concede this: the waters could have been moved by the force of the wind, a phenomenon to be seen every day on the sea, when the waters flow in the direction of the movement of the wind. If the sea was dried up by the force of a strong south wind in the time of Moses,<sup>7</sup> could not a body of water be dried up in the same manner? Did not the waters, too, have the power of flowing into the sea, water which later on was actually severed from the bed of the sea? Let them learn that nature can be changed, after water burst forth from a rock and iron floated on water,<sup>8</sup> a marvel which Eliseus succeeded in doing by the power of prayer and not by command.

If, therefore, Eliseus caused iron, contrary to nature, to lose its weight in water, could not Christ put the water in motion? But He had the power of moving the waters who was able to say, 'Lazarus, come forth'<sup>9</sup> and bring the dead back to life, since God always brings to pass what He ordains. In like manner understand the words: 'Let the waters be gathered together in one place,' and they were

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Matt. 8.24,26.

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 7.11; cf. 8.1.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Exod. 14.27.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Exod. 17.6; 4 Kings 6.6.

<sup>9</sup> John 11.43.

gathered. By saying: 'Let them be gathered,' He not only moved the waters from their place, but He also set them down in a place, so that they would not flow away, but stand still.

(10) The following is on this account a greater marvel: how all the bodies of water flowed into one body and how that one body was not full to overflowing. Scripture, too, reckoned this among extraordinary happenings by stating: 'All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea doth not overflow.'<sup>10</sup> By the command of God, therefore, two things are accomplished: the waters flow, yet do not overflow. A boundary is set up by which the seas are circumscribed and confined, lest the waters inundate everything by pouring over the earth and lest the earth, devoid of cultivation, may prevent the soil from fulfilling its natural function of producing in abundance.

Let them recognize the fact, therefore, that this is the result of divine precept and of celestial operation, for the Lord addresses Job from the clouds, saying, among other things, this, also, about the barrier of the sea: 'I set my bounds around it and made it bars and doors, and I said: "hitherto thou come and shalt go no further, but on thyself shall be broken thine own waves."<sup>11</sup> Do we not ourselves often see the sea billowing so that its waves rise up 'like a sheer mountain of water,'<sup>12</sup> when it breaks its force in foam against the shore, beaten back by what might be called the barriers of the low-lying sandy beach, according to what the Scripture says: 'Will you not then fear me, saith the Lord, who has set the sand a bound for the sea?'<sup>13</sup> Thus the violent onslaught of the sea is held in check by the most

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<sup>10</sup> Eccle. 1.7.

<sup>11</sup> Job 38.10,11.

<sup>12</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.105.

<sup>13</sup> Jer. 5.22.

unstable of all things, ordinary coarse sand of the seashore. The waves recoil and are guided to their prescribed bounds by a command from heaven, and the violent movement of the water is broken by meeting itself. It then departs in receding ripples.<sup>14</sup>

(11) Moreover, unless the force of a celestial decree did not serve as a check, who would prevent the Red Sea from pouring over the plains of Egypt (which is claimed to be flat and low-lying with very deep valleys) and from mingling its waters with the Egyptian Sea? The men who wished to connect these two seas and to make them one have made us aware of the fact. The Egyptian Sesostris of an older period and Darius the Mede, in virtue of his greater power, wanted to put into effect what had been attempted before their time by a native of the country. This fact is substantial evidence that the Indian Ocean, which includes the Red Sea, is of higher elevation than the Egyptian Sea, the level of whose waters is lower. And it may well have been that both kings relinquished their projects lest the sea, in headlong rush from a higher to a lower level, should inundate their land.

### *Chapter 3*

(12) And now, on the statement: 'Let the waters be gathered together in one place,' the question would arise: How could one body of water be formed from what is scattered over lakes, marshes and swamps, also waters which inundate valleys, plains and level lands, stemming from springs and from rivers? Moreover, how could these waters form one mass, whereas today waters are scattered in diverse seas? For we speak of such varied seas as these: the ocean,

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.161.

the Tyrrhenian, Adriatic, Indian, Egyptian, and Pontic seas, the Propontic, the Hellespont, Euxine, Aegean, Ionian, and Atlantic seas. Many also speak of a Cretic Sea and of a Northern Caspian. Let us therefore consider the meaning of the words of Scripture and weigh them with exactitude.

(13) 'Let the waters,' He said, 'be gathered together in one place.' The mass of water is continuous and unbroken, yet there are different coastal bays, as a profane writer states.<sup>1</sup> For the Pontus is a very large bay of our sea [the Mediterranean] to which different names are given in different places. Rightly so, because the regions adjacent to these bodies of water give them special names, yet there is but one mass of water, because one continuous and unbroken body of water extends from the Indian sea up the shores of Cadiz and from there extends to the Red Sea, to the extreme limit of the world, which is enclosed by the circumambient Ocean. Within this circle the Adriatic mingles with the Tyrrhenian Sea, while other seas form a union with the Adriatic—seas distinguished from it by name, but not by a difference of water mass.

Hence, God has fittingly said: 'The getting together of waters he called seas.'<sup>2</sup> And so there is one general mass which is called a sea and many bodies of water which are called seas after the regions where they are situated. Just as there are many lands, such as Africa, Spain, Thrace, Macedonia, Syria, Egypt, Gaul, and Italy, which are given names from their respective regions, so there is but one earth. In a similar manner, there are many seas named after their locations, but there is but one actual sea, as the Prophet says: 'Thine are the heavens and thine is the earth, the world and the fulness thereof Thou hast founded; the north

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<sup>1</sup> Cicero, in *Timaeus*, now a fragment.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 1.10.

and the sea thou hast created.’<sup>3</sup> And the Lord Himself says to Job: ‘I have shut up the sea with doors.’<sup>4</sup>

(14) Now that we have spoken of one mass, the question arises how a single body of water could drain the land of water, although that water had previously possessed all the land, poured into the hollow places in the mountains, plains, and valleys—water which lay stagnant in an universal inundation. For, if everything was covered in this way—for He would not have said: ‘The earth appeared,’ unless He wished to indicate that it was uncovered everywhere—if the flood in the time of Noe hid even the mountains when there already was a separation of the waters above the heavens and those below the firmament—if this were so, then how can one doubt that the tops of the mountains were hidden in the inundation we speak of? Whence, then, came that overabundant supply of water? What reservoirs were there, so continuous and unbroken as to hold all the water in place?

(15) On this subject there is much at hand for the formulation of reply. First of all, the Creator of all things had the power of enlarging space—a power which some before us have in their private opinion laid down as a possibility. And I am not overlooking in this case the potency of God; but what He actually has done, which I have not learned from the clear testimony of Scripture, I pass over as a mystery, lest, perchance, that stir up other questions starting even from this point. Nevertheless, I maintain in accord with the Scriptures that God can extend the low-lying regions and the open plains, as He has said: ‘I will go before thee and make level the mountains.’<sup>5</sup> The very force of water can also make its bed deeper by the violent movements of the waves and by the impact of the surf of that wild

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<sup>3</sup> Ps. 88.12,13.

<sup>4</sup> Job 38.8.

<sup>5</sup> Isa. 45.2.



element which day by day stirs up the bottom of the sea, drawing forth sands from its very depths.

Who, then, knows how far that mighty sea pours its waters which, unapproachable even to daring navigators, encloses the British Isles with its innumerable bays and extends even to remote regions, unknown and unrecorded even in legendary tales? Who is not aware of the mass of water from the sea which has seeped into the numerous lakes, such as the Lucrine and Lake Avernus in Italy, Lake Tiberias, too, in Palestine, not to mention that lake that lies in the desert region of Arabia between Palestine and Egypt,<sup>6</sup> and the water which has seeped into the several ports made by Augustus and by Trajan, as well as into many similar ones throughout the entire world?

(16) Still, there are some lakes and standing waters which are not connected with other waters, such as Lake Como, Lake Garda, the Alban lake—and many others. How then can one speak of one mass of water? But, just as God made two luminaries, the sun and the moon—although there still exist, to be sure, the lights of the stars—in like manner, we speak also of one mass of water, although there are very many such. The reason is that what has not been taken in consideration in any enumeration is not reckoned in the sum total.

#### *Chapter 4*

(17) But it seems that, while I was speaking of the sea, I exceeded my bounds a little. Let us return to our theme and let us reflect on the words of the Lord: 'Let the waters be gathered together into one place and let the dry land

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<sup>6</sup> The Dead Sea.



appear,<sup>1</sup> He did not say: 'Let the land appear.' Who does not note the appropriateness of this statement? For the earth could be a composite of mud and water, and thus its appearance would be concealed by the inundating water. The term 'dry' applies not only to the general nature of the earth, but can also be used in a specific way, so that the earth may be useful, firm, suitable, and ready for cultivation. At the same time, it was provided that the earth would, to all appearance, have been dry by the hand of God rather than by the sun, for the earth actually became dry before the sun was created. Wherefore, David, too, distinguished the sea from the land, referring to the Lord God: 'For the sea is his and he made it, and his hands made the dry land.'<sup>2</sup>

The word 'dry' is the expression of a natural characteristic; the word 'earth' is a simple name of a thing which has in itself that same characteristic. Just as the word 'animal' is a generic term which includes within it a certain notable property, and as man has his special characteristic which is reason, in like manner the word 'earth' can be used indifferently of what is saturated with water or of a place 'in a desert land and where there is no way and no water.'<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the land saturated with water has within it elements of dryness, as it has been written: 'He hath turned rivers into a wilderness and the sources of waters into dry ground,'<sup>4</sup> that is to say, He made dry the land that was before filled with water.

(18) The earth, therefore, has its own peculiar property, just as the individual elements have, for each has its own characteristic: the air is humid, water is cold, and fire is warm. That these are the chief qualities of each of the

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1 Gen. 1.9.

2 Ps. 94.5.

3 Ps. 62.3.

4 Ps. 106.33.

elements can be determined by our observation. If we should desire to make a test of these elements with our bodily senses we find that their qualities exist in a certain combination. For example, we discover earth to be dry and cold; water, cold and humid; air, warm and humid; fire, warm and dry. Thus, each and every one of the elements is bound together by qualities shared in common with some other element.

Since earth has a quality both dry and cold, it is connected with water by association of its cold quality, and through water it is related to the air because the air is humid. Hence, water seems to embrace with its two arms, as it were, cold and humidity, on the one side, the earth, on the other, air—the earth with its quality of coldness, the air with its quality of humidity. Air, by its nature, also forms an intermediary between two opposing elements, that is, between water and fire, for it binds both elements together. It shares with water the quality of humidity and with fire the quality of warmth. Fire, too, since it is by nature warm and dry, is bound to air by its quality of warmth, and, because of its dry quality, is turned back to form an association and a union with earth. In this manner these elements, by a circuitous process, meet together in a dance measure of concord and association. Hence, the Latin *elementa* is found in Greek as στοιχεῖα, denoting agreement and harmony.

(19) We have come to this point because Scripture says that God called the earth 'dry,' that is to say, He denominated by its natural quality that which is its prime characteristic. The natural characteristic for earth is dryness. This is a quality reserved for it. Its prime quality, therefore, is dryness. A secondary quality is that of coldness, but this does not take precedence over its primary trait. The fact that it is humid is also derived from its kinship with water. Hence, the former characteristic is peculiar to the earth, the other is alien: dryness belongs to earth; humidity is alien to it. The Author

of nature accordingly adhered to what He had first granted to the earth, for one quality is founded on nature; the other comes from an [external] cause. The peculiar qualities of the earth, therefore, ought to be determined from the primary qualities, not from what is accidental, in order that our knowledge might be formed from an observation of the preferred characteristic.

### *Chapter 5*

(20) 'And God saw that it was good.' We do not fail to record the fact that some do not believe that either in the Hebrew or in other versions it is said: 'The waters were gathered together into their places and dry land appeared. And God called the dry land Earth and the gathering together of the waters he called Seas.'<sup>1</sup> Also, when God said: 'And it was so done,'<sup>2</sup> they are generally of the opinion that there we have the words of the Creator signifying the fulfillment of the work. But, because in regard also to other created things there is found first the formula of a command and afterwards the repeated indication or execution of a work, for that reason we do not think that which is considered an addition to be in the nature of an absurdity, even if by other interpreters sufficient proof may be presented for either its truth or its authenticity. Much that was added or attached to the Hebrew version by the writers of the Septuagint we have discovered not to be superfluous.

(21) God saw, then, that the sea was good. The aspect of this element is beautiful, either when the sea foams with its

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.10.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 1.9; thus the Vulgate may be translated. The most recent version, 'And so it was,' follows the Hebrews and Septuagint more closely.

surging white caps and mountings billows, or when it bedews the rocks with its snowy spray, or even when under a balmy breeze it shimmers, often in this case presenting itself to the beholder from afar in colors of purple, suggesting serene tranquillity. Such is the aspect of the sea when it does not beat the nearby shores with the onrush of its waves, but when the waters greet it, as it were, in a fond embrace of peace. How gentle is the sound, how pleasing the splash of the water, how pleasant and rhythmic the wave-beats! Notwithstanding all this, I am of the opinion that the beauty of such a creation is not to be estimated by the standard of our own eyes, but is to be gauged in the design of the work as a whole by its conformity and agreement with the intention of its Creator.

(22) The sea, therefore, is good; first, because it supplies the moisture necessary for the earth, to which it furnishes, so to speak, a sustaining fluid through the hidden apertures of its veins. The sea is good in its functions as a biding-place for the rivers, as a source of rainfall, as a place for the reception of alluvial deposits, as a carrier of merchandise, thereby linking distant people together. Furthermore, the sea defends us from the perils of warfare; by the sea, the fury of the barbarian is hedged in; the sea provides support in times of necessity, a refuge in times of danger, a delightful place for seekers after pleasure; it is a source of health for the sick,<sup>3</sup> it joins together the separated; to voyagers it is a time-saver, to men in trouble a place of escape, to tax-payers it is an aid, and to the farmer in distress it is a means of livelihood. From the sea we obtain rain for the earth, since water is drawn from the sea which is deprived of its moisture by the sun's rays. Then, the higher it reaches, the colder it becomes by reason of the shadowy coolness of the clouds. As a result, we have rainfall, which not only relieves the earth

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<sup>3</sup> See Mullach, *Fragmenta phil. Græc.* I 518a vs 15.

of its dryness, but also provides nourishment to the famishing fields.

(23) Why need I enumerate the islands, which often adorn the sea with their jewelled necklaces? Men who hide themselves there seek to escape from the world with all its inducements to intemperate living with a firm purpose to live in continence and thereby avoid the dubious conflicts of this life. The sea, then, is a hiding-place for the temperate, an abode for those who wish to practice continency, a refuge for those in distress, a haven for the secure, a place of tranquillity for the unworldly and a place in this world for the prudent and moderate. Moreover, it provides an incentive to devout living for the faithful, so that they may rival the gentle sound of lapping waters with the songs of the psalms. Thus, the islands voice their approval with their tranquil chorus of blessed waters and with the singing of pious hymns resound.

How is it possible for me to comprehend all the beauty of the sea—a beauty beheld by the Creator? Why say more? What else is that melodic sound of the waves if not the melody of the people? Hence, the sea is often well compared to a church which ‘disgorges a tide’ through all its vestibules at the first array of the approaching congregation;<sup>4</sup> then, as the whole people unite in prayer, there is a hiss of receding waves; the echo of the psalms when sung in responsive harmony by men and women, maidens and children is like the sound of breaking waves. Wherefore, what need I say of this water other than it washes away sin and that the salutary breath of the Holy Spirit is found in it?

(24) May God grant us our prayer: to sail on a swift ship under a favorable breeze and finally reach a haven of safety; that we may not be exposed to spiritual obstacles too great to overcome; that we may not meet with ship-

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<sup>4</sup> Virgil, *Georgics* 2.462.

wreck to our faith. We pray, also, for a peace profound and, if there be anything that may arouse the storms of this world against us, that we may have as our ever-watchful pilot our Lord Jesus, who by His command can calm the tempest and restore once more the sea's tranquillity.<sup>5</sup> To Him be honor and glory in perpetuity, both now and forever, and for all ages to come. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Matt. 8.26; Luke 8.24.



## THE FIFTH HOMILY

*Chapter 6*

(25) When the waters receded, it was proper that a special aspect and charm be bestowed on the earth so that it would cease 'to be invisible and without form.'<sup>1</sup> For many maintain that a thing is invisible because it has no special aspect. For that reason they hold that the earth was invisible—not because it could not be seen by the most high God or by His angels, but because it was without a special aspect. It could not be seen by men or even beasts because they had not yet been created. What provides this aspect for the earth is the soil's verdure and vegetation. Hence, in order to bestow visibility and form on the earth, God says: 'Let the earth bring forth the green herb and such as may seed and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, which may have seed in itself upon the earth.'<sup>2</sup>

(26) Let us pay heed to the words of truth! Their content is the salvation of those who hear! For that first declaration of God is a law of nature which requires that every creature be born. This law has continued in force for all ages, with the intent to prescribe how a continuous succession of plants may experience in time to come modes of generation and fructification.<sup>3</sup> And so, first there is germination, when the seeds seem to burst forth newly born; next, when the sprout has burst forth and becomes a green shoot; when the green shoot has grown a little it becomes the green herb. How serviceable, how effective, is the speech: 'Let the earth bring forth the green herb,' that is so say, let the earth bring

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.2.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 1.11.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 2.122-134.

forth of itself, let it not seek the aid of another, let it not be needful of any other ministrations.

(27) Many, it is true, are accustomed to state that the earth could not have germinated without the warmth of the sun's temperate heat and in some way by its fostering rays. Hence, the Gentiles bestow divine honors on the sun, because it penetrates the bowels of the earth with the power of its heat and in that way cherishes the scattered seed or frees from the bonds of frost the sap of the trees. Listen, then, to God who utters words like these: Let the foolish speech of men be silent for future time, let their baseless opinions cease to be! Before the light of the sun shall appear, let the green herb be born, let its light be prior to that of the sun. Let the earth germinate before it receives the fostering care of the sun, lest there be an occasion for human error to grow. Let everyone be informed that the sun is not the author of vegetation. The earth is freed through the clemency of God; the fruit of the earth emerges therefrom through His indulgence. How can the sun give the faculty of life to growing plants, when these have already been brought forth by the life-giving creative power of God before the sun entered into such a life as this? The sun is younger than the green shoot, younger than the green plant!

### *Chapter 7*

(28) And perhaps some may wonder why sustenance for animals was provided before food for man was created. In this matter we ought to take note of the depths of God's wisdom,<sup>1</sup> in that He does not neglect the least of things. For, the divine Wisdom utters these words in the Gospel: 'Look at the birds of the air, they do not sow or reap or

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Rom. 11.33.

gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you of much more value than they?'<sup>2</sup> If these have their food through the kindness of God, then no one ought to pride himself on his own industry and natural ability. And no one ought to give simple and natural food precedence over the rest. The former is the food of the temperate; the rest of foods contribute to delight and luxury. One is common to all living things; the other, to a few. Hence, such a fact furnishes us with an example for frugal living, and is a wise injunction that we ought to be content to live on simple herbs, on cheap vegetables and fruits such as nature has presented to us and the generosity of God has offered to us. This sort of food is wholesome and useful, too, in that it wards off disease and prevents indigestion. No human labor has provided it; it is, rather, the bounteous gift of God. Vegetables are at hand which were not sown; there is fruit that needed no seed—all so sweet and pleasant that they furnish enjoyment even to those who have already sated themselves. In a word, the food that was used for the first course continued to be used for the second.

(29) What more need I add to the theme of the marvels of this creation and to the proof of the existence of a Creative Wisdom? For, in the appearance of a bud on the one hand, and in the provision of a green herb, on the other, there lies an image of the life of man and what may be termed a clear indication and mirror of our nature and of our condition. That green herb and flower of the field are a figure of the flesh of man, as the true interpreter of divinity has expressed in organ tones: 'Cry! What shall I cry? All flesh is grass and all the glory of man is as the flower of the field. The grass is withered and the flower is fallen, but the word of the Lord endureth forever.'<sup>3</sup> This is the thought of God

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<sup>2</sup> Matt. 6.26.

<sup>3</sup> Isa. 40.6-9; 1 Peter 1.24.

though uttered by the voice of man. God says: 'Cry,' but He speaks in the person of Isaias, who answered: 'What shall I cry?' and, as he had heard what he should say, added: 'All flesh is grass.' And with truth, for the glory of man waxes green in his flesh like grass, and what is considered to be sublime is actually a lowly green herb. Blooming early as a flower and briefly as the green herb, it has the outward appearance of vigor, but its fruit has no lasting quality. It displays like a flower the joys of a happy existence, but is destined to pass away in all too brief a moment like the green herb, 'which withereth before it be plucked up.'<sup>4</sup> For what strength can there be in flesh, what enduring quality can there be in health?

Today you may behold a youth who is strong and vigorous in the flower of his age, pleasing in aspect and with the fine glow of health.<sup>5</sup> Tomorrow you meet the same youth, but how changed are his form and features!<sup>6</sup> The young man who the previous day appeared to luxuriate in health and beauty is now an object of pity, prostrate and weakened by the inroads of some illness. Toil or want take their toll of health: some suffer from stomach ills; others from abuse of wine. Still others are enfeebled by old age; others are emasculated and disfigured by overindulgence in pleasure. Is it not true that 'the grass is withered and that the flower has fallen?'<sup>7</sup>

Another man, who claims nobility from his grandfather and great-grandfather<sup>8</sup> and has been made illustrious by the insignia of offices held by his ancestors, a man renowned by the trappings of his noble birth, abounding in friends, surrounded on both sides by a crowd of clients

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4 Ps. 128.6.

5 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.168.

6 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.274.

7 Isa. 40.7.

8 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.56.

who accompany him like a troop of slaves to and from his house<sup>9</sup>—should this man suddenly find himself faced with some passing peril, he is abandoned by all, he is shunned by his friends and assailed by his relatives. Consider how true it is that the life of man is like the grass of the field, 'which withereth before it is plucked up.'

There is also the man who for a long time has had abundance of wealth, the fame of whose generosity has flitted over the lips of every man,<sup>10</sup> a man renowned for his honors, outstanding in power, with a lofty seat in the tribunals, enthroned aloft and regarded as happy by the populace while he is being announced by the cries of the heralds. By a sudden change of fortune he is dragged away into the same prison into which he himself had cast others. Among his own victims he bewails in anguish his impending punishment. What crowds of sycophants and what a invidious procession of throngs of people had formerly conducted him from his home! Just one night put an end to the splendor of that triumphal pomp! Human glory of this kind is like a flower of the field which, even when it is taken away, contributes nothing to the labor. From it no fruit is obtained and, when it is allowed to fall, it fades away, depriving man of the protective covering by which he is shaded from above and animated within.

(31) Would that we could imitate the green herb concerning which the Lord speaks: 'Let the earth bring forth the green herb and such as may seed and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind of a like nature.'<sup>11</sup> Let us sow, therefore, the seed after its kind. What that kind is, hear the Apostle who says that we ought to seek after that divine seed, if we would succeed in any way in finding the divine:

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9 Cf. Sallust, *Bellum Jug.* 85.10.

10 Cf. Ennius, cited by Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.34.

11 Gen. 1.11.

‘Though he is not far from any one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being as some of you,’ he adds, ‘have said: “For we are also his offering.”’<sup>12</sup>

Following this principle, let us sow the seed, not in the flesh, but in the spirit. For we ought not to sow carnal seeds, but spiritual ones,<sup>13</sup> if we desire to attain eternal life. And what that ‘likeness’ is you are not unaware, you who have been made to the ‘image and likeness’ of God. The green herb corresponds to its kind. You do not correspond to your kind. When a grain of wheat is scattered over the soil it returns the gift of its kind; but you degenerate. Grain does not dishonor the true character of its seed; you dishonor the purity of your soul, the vigor of your mind, the chastity of your body.

(32) Do you recognize the fact that you are the work of Christ? With His own hands He formed you, as we read, yet you, Manichaeans, you assume for yourself another author. God the Father says to His Son: ‘Let us make man to our image and likeness,’<sup>14</sup> yet you, adherent of Photinus, say that in the construction of the world there was no Christ.<sup>15</sup> And you, follower of Eunomius, say the Son is unlike the Father. For if He is His image, then He is in no wise dissimilar; rather, He reflects entirely His Father, who impressed on Him the unity of His substance. The Father says: ‘Let us make’; yet you refuse to co-operate. The Son carried out what the Father spoke, yet you deny the equality in Him in whom the Father was well pleased.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Acts 17.27,28.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 9.11.

<sup>14</sup> Gen. 1.26; cf. 1.27.

<sup>15</sup> See Vol. 22 of this series, p. 329.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Matt. 3.17.



*Chapter 8*

(33) 'Let the earth,' He said, 'bring forth the green herb after its kind.'<sup>1</sup> All things which are referred to as growing in the earth begin with a seed. When it has emerged a little it becomes a green shoot, then a stalk, and finally bears fruit. There are growing plants which spring from the root, such as trees which are not sown from seed, but grow from the roots of other trees. We see in the case of a reed how at its base there emerges from its side a sort of bulb from which other seeds germinate. There is in the root, therefore, something which has the potency of a seed. There are grafted plants, too, which germinate higher up. Hence, some plants reproduce themselves from the root; others are reproduced in diverse ways. For in every growing thing there is either a seed or something which has the power of a seed. These plants follow their kind, so that what emerges from them is similar to what has been sown or like those from whose roots they germinate. As examples we can point to the fact that wheat produces wheat and that from millet comes millet; again, the pear tree with its white flowers<sup>2</sup> produces pears, and the chestnut trees springs from the root of the chestnut.

(34) 'Let the earth,' He said, 'bring forth the green herb after its kind.' And forthwith the earth in labor brought forth new plants; girding herself with the garments of verdure, she luxuriated in fecundity, and decked in diverse seedlings, she claimed them as her own fitting adornments. We marvel at the speed of that productivity. How many more wonders appear, if you examine each plant, noticing how the seed when laid in the earth decays and, if it did not die, would bear no fruit; but when it decays, by that

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.11.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 2.71,72.

very act of death, arises to bear fruit in greater abundance.<sup>3</sup> The pliable sod receives, then, a grain of wheat;<sup>4</sup> the scattered seed is controlled by the use of the hoe and mother earth cherishes it in firm embraces to her breast. When that grain decays, there comes the pleasing aspect of the green burgeoning shoot, which immediately reveals its kind from its similarity to its own seed, so that you may discover the nature of the plant even in the very beginning of its growth, and its fruit, too, is made evident to you. Gradually, it grows so as eventually to attain full maturity and height. At the point when the jointed stalk emerges, sheaths for the grain to come are being prepared. Within these the grain is being formed, so that cold may not cause injury to the plant in its tender beginnings, or the heat of the sun burn it, or the cruel violence of the wind and rain beat it to the ground. In addition, the ear of wheat has wonderfully formed rows both pleasing in appearance and made for the protection of the plant, resulting from their naturally interwoven texture which is the creation of divine Providence. Moreover, in order to serve as a support for and to offset the weight of a more abundant number of ears, the stalk itself is enclosed in what may be termed sheaths, so that by its reinforced strength it can sustain manifold grains of wheat and that it may not be bent towards the earth because of its inability to bear its burden. Then, over the ear is erected a rampart in the form of a beard, so that a line of defense may be extended to protect the ear from injury from the attacks of little birds, by which means the wheat grain is kept intact from the devastation of their claws.<sup>5</sup>

(35) What shall I say of the kindness of God in providing things useful for the human race? The earth returned with

3 Cf. John 12.24.

4 Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 1.44.

5 Cf. Cicero, *De senectute* 15.51, for language and thought.

interest what it had received, even with compound interest! Men often deceive and often defraud the money-lender of his just due. But the earth remains faithful to promises and, if at time it does not pay back, if, perchance, severe cold or extraordinary dry weather or tremendous rain storms bring disaster, the losses of a single year are counterbalanced by the year which follows. And so, when the harvest belies the hopes of the farmer, in no way does the earth forsake him. Again, when she smiles on him, fertile Mother Earth pours forth her offspring, so that she never incurs a loss to her creditors.

(36) When the land, in fact, is completely stocked, how can we, if we are to rely on our tongue, satisfactorily describe the pleasant sights and scents and the joys of the countryman? But we have the testimony of the Scripture, wherein we note that the delights of the countryside are compared to the blessing and grace of the saints, for Isaac, a holy man, says: 'The smell of my son is the smell of a plentiful field.'<sup>6</sup>

How can I describe the violets with their shades of purple, the lilies of brilliant white, and the roses with their shades of red? How describe the landscape painted with flowers, sometimes of a golden hue or of varied colors or of bright yellow, among which you cannot decide whether their beauty or their fragrant scent gives more delight.<sup>7</sup> Our eyes revel in this pleasant spectacle as that fragrance which fills us with its sweetness is spread far and wide. Whence the Lord has justly said: 'And with me is the beauty of the field.'<sup>8</sup> This beauty is with Him because He has created it. What other artist could so depict such charm in each and every object?

'Consider the lilies of the field,' what brilliance in their

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<sup>6</sup> Gen. 27.27.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 2.132.

<sup>8</sup> Ps. 49.11.

petals, how they appear to arise in packed rows all the way to the top so as to form a goblet! Note how within it gleams like gold, and, furthermore, how around its edge as a defense against any injury a kind of rampart is constructed! If any one were to pluck this flower and take each petal apart, what craftsman's hand is so expert as to be able to restore the form of the lily? Who is such an effective imitator of nature as to presume to reconstruct this flower, to which the Lord has so borne testimony as to say: 'Not even Solomon in all his glory was so arrayed like one of these'?<sup>9</sup> A king so rich and wise was deemed inferior to the beauty of this flower!

(3) Why should I enumerate the health-giving juices of herbs or the remedies provided by shrubs and leaves? When a stag is sick, he eats the branches of the olive tree and becomes well. The leaves of the olive, too, cure the locusts of illness. The application of the leaves of a bramble to a serpent bring about his death. Gnats will not trouble you if you anoint yourself with wormwood which has been cooked in oil.

### *Chapter 9*

(38) But some perhaps may say: How do you account for the fact that deadly poisonous plants grow along with those that are of use, for example, there is found along with wheat the poisonous hemlock, a plant discoverable among those that support life. Unless you are on your guard against it, this plant can injure your health. Found growing among other plants that help to sustain life are hellebore and monk's hood, which too often delude and deceive the gatherer.<sup>1</sup> But would you find fault with the earth because

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<sup>9</sup> Matt. 6.28,29.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 2.152.

not all men are good? What is of more consequence, you should realize that not all the angels of heaven were good. The sun itself by its excessive heat parches the ears of wheat and causes the young growing plants to wither, whereas the moon shows voyagers the way and reveals the lurking places of robbers.<sup>2</sup> Is it right, therefore, that we disregard the bounty of the Founder in furnishing us useful things and, just because of certain noxious plants, detract from the forethought of the Creator? Some people act as if everything had to be created for our gourmandizing or as if there was just a trifling amount left by the kindness of God to minister to our appetites. Definite foods have been allotted to us which are known to all, foods which provide us with both pleasure and physical health.

(39) Each and every thing which is produced from the earth has its own reason for existence, which, as far as it can, fulfills the general plan of creation. Some things, therefore, are created for our consumption; other things serve for other uses. There is nothing without a purpose; there is nothing superfluous in what germinates from the earth. What you consider as useless has use for others; as a matter of fact, it often is useful to you in another way. That which does not serve for food has medical qualities, and it often happens that what is harmful to you provides harmless food for birds or wild beasts. Thus, starlings feed on the hemlock without any ill effects, since by their physical nature they are immune to its deadly and poisonous sap. Such sap, in fact, is cold by nature, which, when conducted through fine pores into the region of the heart, by a process of premature digestion is prevented from reaching the vital organs themselves. Those who are expert on the nature of hellebore say that it provides food and sustenance to quails and that through a certain natural composition of their

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2 Cf. St. Ambrose, *Hymns* 2.7 (*nocturna lux viantribus*).



bodies these animals become immune to its harmful effects. The fact is that through medical science this plant frequently serves to preserve the health of the human body, to which it seems to be adverse. As a consequence, what the doctor's hand converts to the preservation of our health becomes even to a greater degree, through its natural qualities, a means for providing food for others. Slumber is often induced, too, by the use of the mandrake, whenever the sick are troubled by their inability to sleep. Why need I speak of opium which has come to be used almost daily, inasmuch as severe intestinal pains are allayed by its use? And it has not escaped our notice that the ravings of the sensual passions frequently have been stayed by hemlock and that with hellebore the prolonged sufferings of a sick body have found relief.

(40) The Creator, therefore, is not liable to blame in these matters; actually, His bounty is increased thereby, inasmuch as what you believed was created to bring danger to you is designed to bring to you health-giving remedies. That which leads to danger is directed otherwise by Providence and what is conducive to our health is not lost through our own prudence and industry.

Is it true that, following a mysterious urge of nature, sheep and goats have learned to shun what is harmful to them and for this purpose are able to make use of smell alone, since they are devoid of reason? Do they not go so far as to recognize a way of avoiding danger and of protecting their health? Do they not distinguish between what is likely to be noxious and what will be beneficial? So true is this that they are said frequently to look for herbs known to them and to apply these as a remedy to a wound when they sense that they have been hit with poisoned weapons. Food, therefore, becomes for them a medicine. As a result, you may behold arrows in the act of falling from a wound,



the poison actually vanishing and not adhering. Furthermore, poison is a food for stags. The snake flees a stag and slays a lion. The dragon winds himself around an elephant, whose downfall brings death to the victor. Thus, they both strive with their utmost strength, one to bind fast the other's foot so that the fall of the vanquished cannot harm him; the other, so that he may not be surprised in a narrow passageway when trailing the herd and thus be caught by a hind leg. In such a situation the elephant would be unable to turn around and crush the dragon with his heavy foot or have the assistance of another elephant at his rear.

(41) Therefore, if irrational animals know what herbs may serve as medicine or what methods may bring assistance to them, can man, who is born with the faculty of reason, be ignorant of this? Or is he such a stranger to truth that he cannot at all perceive what are the uses especially designed for everything? Or is he so ungrateful for the good things provided by nature that, because a draught of bull's blood is deadly to man, this laborious animal ought not for that reason be born or ought to be created without blood? Yet, he possesses a quality which is useful in the cultivation of the fields, adaptable for the service of ploughing and for sustenance, a precious possession. By his manifold uses he in a sound prop to farmers, for whom—should they come to know their own blessings<sup>3</sup>—God has created all things with the words: 'Let the earth bring forth the green herb and such as may seed after its kind.'<sup>4</sup> For He has included in this statement not only what contributes to the farmers' support from herbs, roots, trees and other plants which grow without seed, but He also includes such produce as is acquired by the industrious skill of the toiler of the fields.

(42) How fitting is it that He did not command the earth

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 2.458.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 1.11.

generously to give forth seed and fruits, but ordained that the fields should first germinate and then bring forth plants. Next He bade the seed to grow according to the specific nature of its kind, so that at no time would the landscape be without its charm; first, the verdure of spring for our pleasure, and later the heaped-up piles of harvest for our use.

### *Chapter 10*

(43) Perhaps someone might say: How does the earth produce seed according to its kind, when often the seed sown degenerates and, although good wheat was sown, the result is a wheat plant of a quality inferior in color and in form? If this ever happens, one should not attribute this deterioration to a change of species, but rather, it seems, to to some inferiority or some disease in the seed. It does not cease to be wheat if it has been blighted by frost or mildewed by rain. It has been changed in appearance rather than in kind, and also in color as a result of the corruption it has undergone. Hence, it frequently happens that mildewed grain returns to the appearance of its stock, if it is exposed to the heat of the sun or of fire, or if it is entrusted to careful cultivators, who cherish it by protecting it from inclemencies of climate and foster it in soil that is fertile. In this way, what has suffered degeneration in the parent stock is restored in the next generation. Hence, there is no danger that the precept of God, to which nature has accustomed itself, may become void in future time by a failure of propagation, since today the integrity of the stock is still preserved in the seeds.

(44) We know that cockle and the other alien seeds which often are interspersed among fruits of the earth are called 'weeds' in the Gospel. These, however, belong to a special

species and have not degenerated into another species by a process of mutation from the seed of the wheat plant. The Lord told us that this is so when He said: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while men were asleep, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat.' We gather from this that weeds and wheat certainly seem to be distinct both in name and in kind. Hence, the servants, too, said to the householder: 'Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? How then does it have weeds? He said to them: "An enemy has done this."'<sup>1</sup> One is the seed of the Devil; the other, that of Christ which is sown in accordance with justice. Therefore, the Son of Man sowed one and the Devil sowed the other. For that reason the nature of each is distinct, since the sowers are opposed. Christ sows the kingdom of God, whereas the Devil sows sin. How, therefore, can this kingdom be of one and the same race as sin? 'This is the kingdom of God,' He says, 'as though a man should cast seed into the earth.'<sup>2</sup>

(45) There is a Man who sows the word, of whom it is written: 'The sower sows the word.'<sup>3</sup> This Man sowed the word over the earth when He said: 'Let the earth bring forth the green herb,' and immediately the seeds came to birth and diverse were the species of things which shone forth in brilliance. At this point the fields in their beautiful green color furnished abundance of food; the yellowing ears of wheat in the fields suggested an image of the billowing sea in the waving of that rich harvest in the breeze. Of itself the earth brought forth profusely all kinds of fruits. Although it could not be ploughed in the absence of a cultivator—for the farmer had not yet been created—the earth, though unplowed, teemed with rich harvests, inasmuch as an in-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Matt. 3.24-27.

<sup>2</sup> Mark 4.26.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 4.14.

dolent husbandman did not have occasion to defraud the earth of its abundance. For each plant attains fertility according to the merits of the labor involved in the cultivation of the fields. Punishment is meted out for our neglect or remissness if the soil be deprived of its rich abundance either by flood or aridity, the fall of hailstones or by some other misfortune. Then, too, the earth everywhere brought forth spontaneously fruits of the soil, because He who is the fullness of the universe had so ordained it.<sup>4</sup> The word of God fructified on the earth and the earth had not, because of any curse, suffered condemnation. The origins and birth of the world are more remote than our sins and more recent than our error, because of which we have been condemned 'to eat bread in the sweat of our face,'<sup>5</sup> and without sweat to be incapable of sustaining life.

(46) Even today the fertility of the earth carries into effect its age-old fecundity by exercise of spontaneous growth, for you see how many plants are still grown without being sown. But even in much that is gathered by the labor of our hands there still remains a large part of our produce which, by the kindness of Providence, comes without effort to us while we are at rest. This we are taught by the reading of the Gospel before us, wherein the Lord says: 'This is the kingdom of God, as though a man should cast seed into the earth, then sleep and rise night and day and the seed should sprout and grow without his knowing it. For of itself the earth bears the crop, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the fruit is ripe, immediately he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come.'<sup>6</sup> Therefore, while you are asleep, man, and without your knowing it, the earth of itself produces its fruits. You fall asleep and

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Col. 1.19.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 3.19.

<sup>6</sup> Mark 4.26-29.

then rise, marveling how the grain has increased in the course of one night.

### *Chapter 11*

(47) We have often spoken concerning the green herb; now let us discuss the plant that bears fruit according to its kind, 'which may have seed in itself.'<sup>1</sup> 'He spoke and they were made,'<sup>2</sup> and immediately the earth was adorned with groves as formerly it had been decked with flowers and with the verdure of the grass of the fields. The trees were assembled; the forests arose and the peaks of the hills were clothed with leaves. Here the pine and there the cypress raised aloft their towering heads; the cedars and the pitch-pines gathered in groups. The fir tree also advanced in procession, a tree which was not satisfied to have its roots in the earth and its head on high, but was destined, while mariners are safe, to undergo perils from wind and wave on the sea. The laurel, too, gave forth its scent as it rose, a shrub never to be denuded of its foliage. There arose, also, the shady evergreen oak, destined to preserve its shimmering even in winter time. For nature maintained in every case through future ages the prerogatives which had been impressed on it at the moment of Creation. Hence, the evergreen oak and the cypress adhere to these prerogatives, so that no wind may despoil them of the adornment of their locks.

(48) Mingling formerly with the flowers of the earth and without thorns, the rose, most beautiful of all flowers, displayed its beauty without guile; afterwards, the thorn fenced around this charming flower, presenting, as it were,

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.11.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 32.9.

an image of human life in which what is pleasing in our activities is often accompanied with the stings of anxieties which everywhere surround us. In fact, the elegance of our life is entrenched and hedged about by certain cares, so that sadness is close neighbor to beauty. Hence, when each one of us find joys either in the pleasing exercise of our reason or in the attainment of more than usual success in life, it is fitting that we should call to mind this sin of ours, by means of which there was imposed upon us by rightful condemnation the mind's thorns and the spirit's brambles, when we were happily sojourning amid the delights of paradise. Although you may shine, man, with the splendor of nobility or by reason of your superior power or by the brilliance of your virtue, the thorn is ever close to you, the bramble is ever near you. Ever be mindful of what is beneath you. You blossom into life above a thorn and this beauty does not last for long. In a brief passage of time each and every one of us withers in the flower of his age.

## *Chapter 12*

(49) In truth, while you realize that you possess frailty in common with the flowers, you know that you have access to delight in the use of the vine, from which is produced wine, wherein the heart of man finds cheer.<sup>1</sup> Would that, man, you could imitate the example of this species of plant, so that you may bear fruit for your own joy and delight. In yourself lies the sweetness of your charm, from you does it blossom, in you it sojourns, within you it rests, in your own self you must search for the jubilant quality of your

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ps. 103.15.



conscience. For that reason He says: 'Drink water out of thine own cistern and the streams of thine own well.'<sup>2</sup>

First of all, there is nothing more pleasing than the scent of a blossoming vine. Furthermore, the juice when extracted from the flower of this vine produces a drink which is pleasureable and health-giving. Again, who does not marvel at the fact that from the seed of the grape springs forth a vine that climbs even as high as the top of a tree? The vine fondles the tree by embracing and binding it with the tentacles of its hands and arms, clothes it with vine leaves, and crowns it with garlands of grapes. In imitation of our life, the vine first plants deep its living roots; then, because its nature is flexible and likely to fall, it uses its tendrils like arms in order to hold tight whatever it seizes. By this means it raises itself and lifts itself on high.<sup>3</sup>

(50) Similar to this vine are the members of the Church, who are planted with the root of faith and are held in check by the vine-shoots of humility. On this subject the Prophet beautifully says: 'Thou hast brought a vineyard out of Egypt: thou plantest the roots thereof and it filled the land. The shadow of it covered the hills and the branches thereof the cedars of God. It stretched forth its branches unto the sea and its boughs unto the river.'<sup>4</sup> And the Lord Himself spoke through Isaias, saying: 'My beloved had a vineyard on a hill in a fruitful place. And I fenced it in and dug around the vine of Sorech and I built a tower in the midst thereof.'<sup>5</sup> He fenced it in with a rampart, as it were of heavenly precepts and with the angels standing guard, for 'the angel of the lord shall encamp round about them that fear him.'<sup>6</sup> He placed in the Church a tower, so to speak,

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<sup>2</sup> Prov. 5.15.

<sup>3</sup> For the entire passage, cf. Cicero, *De senectute* 15.52.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 79.9-12.

<sup>5</sup> Isa. 5.1,2.

<sup>6</sup> Ps. 33.8.

of Apostles, Prophets, and Doctors, ready to defend the peace of the Church. He dug around it, when He had freed it from the burden of earthly anxieties. For nothing burdens the mind more than solicitude for the world and cupidity either for wealth or for power.

There occurs an example of this in the Gospel, where we can read the story of the woman 'who had sickness caused by a spirit, and she was bent over, so that she was unable to look upwards.'<sup>7</sup> Bent over, in fact, was her soul, which inclined to terrestrial rewards and possessed not heavenly grace. Jesus beheld her and addressed her; immediately she laid aside her earthly burdens. These people also were burdened with these cupidities to whom He addressed these words: 'Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest.'<sup>8</sup> And so the soul of that woman breathed once more and stood erect like a vine around which the soil has been dug and cleared.

(51) But the same vine, after the soil has been cleared around it, is raised up and bound, so that it may not bend back towards the ground. Some of the shoots are pruned; others are allowed to grow. Those branches which grow in aimless profusion are pruned; those which the good cultivator reckons to be productive are permitted to grow. What need is there to describe the rows of stakes and the orderly process of binding the vine shoots? These operations teach us truly and clearly that equality should be observed in the Church, so that no man of wealth and high position should exalt himself and that no one who is poor and lowly should despair. Liberty is one and the same for all members of the Church; all men possess justice and favor in an impartial manner.

For that reason the tower is placed in the middle, to serve

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<sup>7</sup> Luke 13.11.

<sup>8</sup> Matt. 11.28.

all around as an example of those countrymen and those fishermen who deserved to hold fast the fort of virtue. By their example our courage is aroused and is not permitted to lie mean and despised on the ground. Rather, each and every one of us has his mind raised aloft to higher things so that he dares to say: 'But our citizenship is in heaven.'<sup>9</sup> Hence, to prevent it from being bent and battered by the storms and tempests of the world, the vine holds in the embrace of love, by means of those tendrils and bonds of which we spoke, all that are near and finds rest in being joined with them. That is love, therefore, which binds us with things on high and plants us in heaven. Because 'he who abides in love, God abides in him.' Hence the Lord also says: 'Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remain on the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches.'<sup>10</sup>

(52) It seems clear, therefore, that the example of the vine is designed, as this passage indicates, for the instruction of our lives. It is observed to bud in the mild warmth of early spring and next to produce fruit from the joints of the shoots, from which a grape is formed. This gradually increases in size, but it still retains its bitter taste. When, however, it is ripened and mellowed by the sun, it acquires its sweetness. Meanwhile, the vine is decked in green leaves by which it is protected in no slight manner from frosts and other injuries and is defended from the sun's heat. Is there any spectacle which is more pleasing or any fruit that is sweeter?<sup>11</sup> What a joy to behold the rows of hanging grapes like so many jewels of a beautiful countryside, to pluck those grapes gleaming in colors of gold or purple!

9 Phil. 3.20.

10 John 4.16; 9.15.

11 Cf. Cicero, *De senectute* 15.53.

You may notice that hyacinths and other gems are brilliant in color, how indigo gleams and how beautifully the pearl shines; still, you do not derive a warning from this, man, that your last day on earth should not find your fruit unripened or that the completion of your time of life should show but slight achievement. Unripened fruit is often bitter in taste. It cannot be sweet until it has grown to perfect maturity. A man perfect in this manner will not ordinarily be harmed by the cold of dread death nor by the heat of the sun of iniquity, because a spiritual grace overshadows him, quelling the fires of cupidity for the things of this world and defending him from the lusts and the burning desires of the flesh.

Let them praise you who behold you and let them admire the marshaled bands of the Church like the serried rows of vine branches, let everyone among the faithful gaze upon the gems of the soul, let them find delight in the maturity of prudence, in the splendor of faith, in the charm of Christian affirmation, in the beauty of justice, in the fecundity of pity, so that it may be said of you: 'Thy wife is a fruitful vine on the sides of thy house,'<sup>12</sup> for the reason that you imitate by the exercise of your abundant and generous giving the plenteous return of a fruit-bearing vine.

### *Chapter 13*

(53) But why do I linger in describing just the vine, when all species of trees have their utility? Some are created to provide fruit; others are granted for our use. Those which are not overproductive of fruit are nevertheless more valuable for the uses they serve. The cedar is suitable for constructing the roof of a house, because its material is of such a kind as

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<sup>12</sup> Ps. 127.3.

to furnish both spacious length for the roof and a quality of lightness for the walls. For the construction of rafters and the adornment of the pediments the most adaptable wood is that of the cypress. Hence, the Church, too, tells us in the Canticles: 'The beams of our houses are of cedar, our rafters of cypress trees.'<sup>1</sup> These words point to the beautiful adornments of its pedimental structure, which, as beams do, uphold by their excellent qualities the superstructure of the Church and give charm to its façade.

The laurel and the palm are emblems of victory. The heads of victors are crowned with laurel; the palm adorns the victor's hand. Hence, the Church, too, says: 'I said: I will go up into the palm tree, I will take hold of the heights thereof.'<sup>2</sup> Seeing the sublimity of the Word and hoping to be able to ascend to its height and to the summit of knowledge, he says: 'I will go up into the palm tree,' that he may abandon all things that are low and strive after things that are higher, to the prize of Christ, in order that he may pluck its fruit and taste it, for sweet is the fruit of virtue.

Again, what shall we say of the poplar, a tree that provides shade for victorious crowns and for binding vines a flexible shoot.<sup>3</sup> What other mystical meaning has this, if not to stand for the goodness of the bonds of Christ? These bonds do not hurt—they are the bonds of grace and of love, so that every person should glory in his bonds as Paul gloried in them when he said: 'Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ.'<sup>4</sup> When bound in these same bonds, those of self-denial and of love, he said: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Jesus Christ?'<sup>5</sup> When bound also by these same bonds,

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<sup>1</sup> Cant. 1.16.

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 7.8.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Eclogues* 3.83.

<sup>4</sup> Philem. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Rom. 8.35.

David has said: 'On the willows in the midst thereof we hung up our instruments.'<sup>6</sup>

The box-wood tree, because of its light material, trains the child's hand when it is used for forming the outlines of the letters of the alphabet. Hence Scripture says: 'Write upon box,'<sup>7</sup> in order that you may be admonished by the wood itself (which is an evergreen and is never devoid of foliage) never to be deprived of the support of your hope, but rather that the hope of salvation may be generated by faith.

(54) Why should I enumerate the great variety of trees, their particular diversities and beauties? Why speak of the wide-spreading beech tree, the slender fir, the leafy pine tree, the shady evergreen oak, the two-colored poplar,<sup>8</sup> the chestnut that loves the groves and ever tends to sprout again as soon as it is cut down? Why relate how in the trees themselves one can determine whether the tree is old or young? In the younger trees the branches are rather slender; in the older they are strong and gnarled; in the former, the leaves are smoother and are far apart; in the latter the leaves are rougher and more shriveled. There are trees which, because their roots are old and completely dead, are unable, if perchance they are cut down, to reproduce themselves; others show a vigorous youth and a more productive nature; a thorough pruning is conducive to profit rather than to harm, so much so that they shoot forth anew and renew themselves in so many offshoots for generations.

(55) There is another occasion for us to marvel at the fact that there is sex even in fruit and distinction of sex in trees. You may notice how the palm tree which produces dates often reaches towards and bends beneath that tree

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<sup>6</sup> Ps. 136.2.

<sup>7</sup> Isa. 30.8.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.276.



which country children call the male palm, presenting in this act a spectacle of one eager for an embrace. That palm tree is female and betrays her sex by her appearance of subjection. Hence, cultivators of groves inject into its branches the seed of dates or of male palm trees, by which is infused into that tree what may be called a sense of its function and sweetness of a desired marital embrace. After the performance of this rite it once more rises up and lifts its branches and elevates its foliage into their former state and condition.

There is similar belief regarding the fig tree. For this reason many are said to plant the wild fig tree beside the cultivated and productive tree, because the fruit of the prolific cultivated fig tree, due either to wind or to heat, is said to fall to the ground. Hence, those acquainted with this method remedy this weakness on the part of the productive fig tree by binding it to the fruit of the wild fig, so that the cultivated tree is able to retain its own fruit, which would at any moment be likely to fall if this remedial procedure were not followed.

From this mystery of nature we are admonished not to shun those who have been separated from our faith and from association with us. And so a Gentile who was converted can be all the more a passionate defender of the faith as he was formerly strong in upholding his error. And if one is a convert from heresy, he can be a stout supporter of that new faith to which he has turned after a change in his convictions. Especially will this be true if he has been gifted by nature to give vivid expression to his opinions and if he finds support in his own moral tendencies toward temperance and chastity. Be lavish, therefore, in your attentions to him, in order that you may, like the productive fig tree, strengthen your own virtue as a result of the presence and juxtaposition of that other uncultivated tree. For in this way your moral

purpose may not be weakened and the fruit of your zeal and grace will be preserved.

(56) How many examples there are of phenomena wherein a natural hardness can be controlled by careful attention to detail in the art of cultivation. Frequently, pomegranates blossom quickly, but are unable to bear fruit without the careful application of remedial methods in the hands of experts, when, as often happens, the juice disappears within the fruit, although it presents a healthy appearance externally. This phenomenon can not without reason be compared to the Church, to which it is applied in the words of the Canticle: 'Thy cheeks are as a piece of a pomegranate,' and further on: 'If the vineyard flourish, if the pomegranates flourish.'<sup>9</sup> For the Church presents to our eyes the brilliance of faith and man's adherence to it—the Church, enhanced by the blood of so many martyrs and by what is more valuable still, by the blood of Christ; at the same time, in the possession of this pomegranate she preserves and includes in one protecting shell plenteous fruit within, involving manifold acts of virtue: the wise man conceals in his heart the good work he performs.<sup>10</sup>

It is said also that fruit growers apply remedial methods of this sort to the almond tree so as to render sweet the bitterness of its fruit. They bore a hole in the root of the tree and insert in the middle of it a shoot of that tree which the Greeks call *πεύκη* and which we call the pitch-pine. When this is done, the bitter taste of its juice disappears.

Accordingly, if the qualities of plants are changed by the process of agriculture, is it not possible to allay any sort of infirmity of the passions by a striving after knowledge and learning? Let no one, then, who is allured by youthful intemperance despair of his conversion. Wood frequently is turned

<sup>9</sup> Cant. 4.3; 7.12.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Prov. 11.13.

to better uses; cannot the hearts of men be likewise changed?

(57) We have shown that there exist different species of fruit among trees of diverse nature and likewise that the same kind of tree often produces fruit of a dissimilar character. The male species produces one kind, while the female furnishes us with another—facts which we have already discussed in a preceding chapter in connection with dates.

Who can comprehend the variety, the appearance, and the delightful qualities of fruits, the usefulness of each and every product of the soil, and the peculiar sap which seems appropriate to each one; furthermore, how fruits of a rather bitter taste serve as medicine to heal our ailing stomachs by allaying swelling and rawness within; again, how the unhealthy humors of the body are modified by the sweet, quality inherent in fruits?

Hence, that art of medicine is older which can cure by the use of herbs and juices. No condition of health is founded on a firmer basis than that which is acquired by the aid of health-giving nourishment. Wherefore, following the guidance of nature we are led to believe that food is our sole medicine. It is certain that open sores are closed by the use of herbs; our internal ills are cured by herbs. For this reason physicians need to know the efficacy of herbs, for from this source the practice of medicine took its rise.

### *Chapter 14*

(58) But to return to a discussion of the ordinary fruit: some there are which are ripened directly by the sun; others reach maturity enclosed in a shell and hull. Apples, pears, and the various species of grape are all exposed naked to the sun. Walnuts and hazelnuts as well as the kernel of the pine-

nut, although covered with a shell and hull, are nourished by the heat of the sun. However deeply the kernel of the pine-nut lies buried, it still is nourished by the sun's heat.

(59) Such, then, is the providence of the Lord that, wherever the fruit is of a softer quality, there the thickness of the leaf presents in defense of the fruit a stouter protective covering, as we see, for example, in the fruit of the fig tree. The more delicate fruits, therefore, need a stronger defense, as the Lord Himself teaches us, speaking through the mouth of Jeremias: 'Like these good figs, so will I regard the captives of Juda, whom I have sent forth out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good. And I will set my eyes upon them for their good.'<sup>1</sup> For He surrounded His precious ones, as it were, with a stouter covering of His mercy, lest the tender fruit should perish before its time. And so, too, He says of them in a later passage: 'My delicate ones have walked rough ways.' To these He speaks further on: 'Be constant, my children, and cry to the Lord.'<sup>2</sup> Against all storms and injuries this is the sole and inviolable protection and impenetrable defense.

Where, therefore, there is tender fruit, there is found a thicker covering and protection furnished by the leaves. On the other hand, where the fruit is sturdier, there the leaves are more delicate, as we see in the case of the apple tree. In the case of the sturdier apple there is not much need for protection to aid it, for the very thickness of the protective shade would serve rather to bring injury to its fruit.

(60) Then, again, the beauty of nature and the profound mysteries of divine wisdom are manifested to us by the leaf of the vine. We note that it is so divided into parts as to present the appearance of three leaves. The middle part is so distinct that it seems to the onlooker to be a separate

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<sup>1</sup> Jer. 24.5,6.

<sup>2</sup> Bar. 4.26,27.

piece, were it not for the fact that it forms a juncture with the lower parts. This seems to follow a natural principle in that it both admits the sunlight more easily and furnishes shade. Then, the middle part of the leaf extends itself and becomes more narrow at the top as it grows, so that it offers more natural beauty than protection. For this reason it seems to present the form of the prize of a victor at the games, indicating that the grape holds the first place among the other species of hanging fruit. By the silent judgment of nature and, furthermore, by its clear decision the grape comes into being as the natural form and emblem of victory. The vine leaf, therefore, carries its prize with it, inasmuch as it furnishes defense for itself against the inclemencies of the air and the violence of storms, while at the same time it presents no obstacle to the reception of the sun's heat from which the grape receives warmth and coloring, growth, and increase.

The fig leaf, too, not unlike the vine leaf, is divided into four parts. This fact appears all the more clearly because of its larger leaf, although its extremities have not the pointed character of the vine leaf. Whereas the leaf of the fig is stronger and thicker, that of the vine presents a more elegant form. The thickness of the fig leaf serves to ward off injury due to storms, while its cleft nature permits the fruit to profit from warmth. Again, this species of fruit feels the force of hail storms less, but reaches maturity quicker, because it seems to hide away from injuries and at the same time to lie open to fostering influences.

(61) Why should I describe the different kinds of leaves, how some are round and others, longer; how some are flexible and others, more rigid; how some leaves do not fall readily, no matter how strong the wind, and how others are shaken off even by a slight motion of the wind?



*Chapter 15*

(62) It would be an endless task to inquire into the properties of each and every thing, either to distinguish diversities by presenting clear evidence for such or to reveal by unfailing proof concealed and hidden causes. For example, water is one and the same substance, yet it often changes into various forms. Water assumes a yellow color in sand; it becomes foamy amid rocks. It has a green aspect in the midst of groves and presents various colors in a region of flowers, becoming brighter among lilies and ruddier amid roses. Water in a grassy region is clearer, but more turbid in marshy places. At its source a stream is more limpid, while sea water is darker. We see, therefore, that water assumes the color of the places through which it flows.

In like manner, too, water undergoes changes due to temperature: in heated places it becomes hot, in shady regions it becomes cool; when exposed to the sun, water acquires excess of heat; when snow falls, it assumes a white color in the form of ice. And what a change takes place in its very taste; at one time it is somewhat sharp, at another somewhat bitter; at times it is rather harsh, at times somewhat tart, and then again rather sweet. These variations are due to the qualities of the substance with which water has been mixed. It becomes bitter because of the infusion of immature juices, as when the shells of nuts are pounded and when leaves are disintegrated. Water becomes bitter by the infusion of wormwood, becomes stronger from an admixture of wine and more tart when garlic is added; it becomes heavy or sweet as the result of the addition of poison or honey. In fact, if the mastick tree and the fruit of the turpentine tree or the kernel of nuts are infused with water, the resulting mixture can readily take on the filmy nature of oil.

While water supplies nourishment to all plants, it contrib-



utes in diverse ways its useful quality to each. If it waters the roots or rains on them from the clouds, it confers distinct strength to all: the root grows in size, the trunk is enlarged, the branches are extended, the leaves become green, the seeds are nourished, and the fruit is likely to increase in number. And so, although water is the nurse of all things, the sap of some species of tree as a result its activity is made somewhat bitter; another becomes sweeter; still others become either sluggish or quick in action. In their quality of sweetness, too, plants manifest differences one with the other. The vine has one type of sweetness, the olive, another; there is a difference between the cherry and the fig; the apple has a distinctive quality and the date is different from the rest.

(63) Even to the touch waters appear at one time smooth, at another, rough. They often give the impression of having oil on their surfaces. Water differs, too, in weight as frequently as in appearance, for in many places it is considered somewhat heavy; in other places, light. No wonder, therefore, if water, while it presents differences in itself, varies also in respect to the quality of the gum of the trees which is generated by the intake of the same water.

The gum of the cherry tree differs in quality from that which exudes from the mastick tree. Also, it is known that the sweet-smelling woods of the Orient distil a drop of balsam of unlike nature. The twigs of the fennel in Egypt and in Libya exude also by some secret process of nature a distinct kind of gum. Why should I relate to you, without burdening you with my discourse, the fact that amber is something which exudes from a shrub and that the gum hardens to form a solid mass of such precious material? This account is supported by evidence of no inconsiderable value, since leaves or very small fragments of twigs or certain tiny species of insects are often found in amber. The drop of amber while still in a more fluid state seems to have laid hold of these

objects and to have retained them when the material had solidified.<sup>1</sup>

(64) But why do I with my indifferent discourse vie with the high and priceless principles of nature, since this discourse springs from the human intellect, whereas divine Providence has created the nature of all things? Hence, the reins of my diffuse discourse should, as it were, be checked,<sup>2</sup> lest I may seem to usurp the wisdom divinely conferred on Solomon in the Scriptures in expounding the 'diversities of plants and the virtues of roots and all such things as are hid and not foreseen.'<sup>3</sup> Yet, these things were not revealed by him in a clear light. In my opinion he would very likely have been able to discourse on the various species of plants,<sup>4</sup> yet he would not have been able to expound fully the nature of all created things.

### Chapter 16

(65) But if the harvests are often more joyous as a result of a plentiful supply of water,<sup>1</sup> if the leguminous plants become green and the manifold beauty of gardens is roused and revived; if the banks of overflowing rivers become resplendent with their verdant cushions,<sup>2</sup> how much more effective is the Word of God than any water course in causing every plant suddenly to burst into flower! Then the plains hastened to bring forth fruit not entrusted to them, gardens were supplied with all manner of vegetables hitherto unknown, and flowers began to germinate in a marvelous

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1 Cf. Pliny, *Historia naturalis* 27.43,46.

2 Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 2.541,542.

3 Wisd. 7.20,21.

4 Cf. 3 Kings 4.33.

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1 Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 1.1.

2 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.674.

manner. The banks of streams began to vest themselves in myrtle. The trees made haste to rise; quickly they clothed themselves in flower,<sup>3</sup> furnishing sustenance for men and food for animals. Fruit became the common property of all; its enjoyment is offered to all. A twofold gift is presented by trees: at one and the same time we are granted nourishment for our bodies and a means of warding off the sun's rays in the cool of their shade; the fruit provides food and the leaves give us occasion for enjoyable living.

However, because the providence of the Creator foresaw that man in his greed would claim the fruit especially for himself, He took care that the rest of living creatures would be given their special nourishment. And so food of no inconsiderable amount was provided for them from the leaves and bark of forest trees. What would avail for medical purposes was provided for both equally: that is, the sap, gum, and young shoots of plants. Hence, the Creator has commanded from the beginning to come forth from the bowels of the earth by the might of His providence those plants which we have later by experiment, use, and example found to be useful, for God destined them for the purpose for which they were adapted.

(66) And the Lord commanded: 'Let the earth bring forth the green herb and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in it,'<sup>4</sup> lest someone may say that neither fruit nor seed appears in many trees and lest a person may think that the divine command is faulty in some respect, by which, in fact, truth may be called into question. Let such a person take note that it can never happen that all things that grow should not eventually spring up out of seeds or possess some qualities which seem to be in keeping with the vital power of seeds. If we pay particular attention

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 1.187.

<sup>4</sup> Gen. 1.1.

to this matter, our understanding of the facts will be aided by the clarity of the evidence. For example, willow trees do not seem to have seeds, but they have in their leaves a kind of kernel which has the efficacy of a seed. When this is committed to the earth, there arises a tree as if it came from a planted sucker. It comes to life as if from a seed. From that kernel a root is truly formed. From the root not only is the willow developed, but there grows a forest of other trees of like kind. The root, too, has the generative quality of a seed; hence, many have propagated their groves by such a process as this.

(67) The power of God is great in everything. Let no one wonder if I have stated that the power of God is great in plants, since He has said that His power was great in the locusts and in the bruchus,<sup>5</sup> for the reason that by the affliction of sterility and famine they punished the offenses to His divine majesty. For great is the power of His patience; great, too, of His providence. Unworthy were they who had injured the Creator of the earth to enjoy earth's fruitfulness! And He is truly great in avenging such great impiety with misery and famine. Hence, if the earth brought forth the sterile bruchus by the mighty power of God, how much greater is the power which brings into being that which is fertile!

(68) Who on seeing a pine cone would not marvel at the art that is indelibly impressed on nature by the command of God and at the fact that, although extended at unequal lengths, the sheath arises from the center core in homogeneous fashion, whereby it protects its own fruit. Hence it preserves the same appearance and arrangement all around. And in every place there is a surplus of kernels and in the circle of the year there comes the blessing of the fruit. Therefore, in this pine cone nature seems to express an image of itself; it preserves its peculiar properties which it received

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5 A kind of locust without wings.

from that divine and celestial command and it repeats in the succession and order of the years its generation until the end of time is fulfilled.

(69) But as in this fruit nature imprints a pleasing representation of itself, so, too, in the tamarisk, that is, in the humble plants,<sup>6</sup> nature has impressed an image of its unrelenting artfulness. For, just as there are men everywhere who are double-dealers at heart, who, while they show themselves to be gracious and unaffected in the presence of good men, cleave to those who are most vicious—so in a similar way these plants have a contrary tendency to spring up in both well-watered regions and in desert lands. That is why Jeremias compared dubious and insincere characters to tamarisks.<sup>7</sup>

### *Chapter 17*

(70) 'Let the earth bring forth,' God said, and immediately the whole earth was filled with growing vegetation. And to man it was said: 'Love the Lord thy God,'<sup>1</sup> yet the love of God is not instilled in the hearts of all. Deaf are the hearts of men than the hardest rock. The earth, in compliance with its Author, furnishes us with fruit which is not owed to us; we deny the debt when we do not give homage to the Author.

(71) Behold the providence of God in little things and, because you are unable to comprehend it, marvel at the fact that He has kept some plants always in foliage while He desired that others undergo changes by being deprived of their vesture. The earth preserves its verdure amid the

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Eclogues* 4.2.

<sup>7</sup> Jer. 17.6.

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<sup>1</sup> Deut. 6.5; Matt. 22.37.

white snow and the cold hoar frost,<sup>2</sup> and, although hidden in ice, its offspring still preserve no slight trace of their viridity.

Those species of trees, also, which are clothed in evergreen foliage have not inconsiderable differences. The olive and the pine always preserve their vesture. Nevertheless, they change their leaves frequently, displaying them, not as something permanent, but as successive adornments of their tree. The apparently unbroken nature of their garb they thus dissimulate by such an interchange. Again, the palm remains always green by reason of the retentive and enduring qualities of its foliage, not because of any change. For the leaves which it first produced continue to perpetuate themselves without recourse to substitution.

Imitate the palm, man, so that it may be said also to you: 'Thy stature is like a palm tree.'<sup>3</sup> Preserve the verdure of your childhood and of that natural innocence of youth which you have received from the beginning, and may you possess the fruits, prepared in due time, of what was planted along the course of the waters—and may there be no fall to your leaf!

To this verdure of grace everflourishing in Christ the Church refers in saying: 'I sat down under his shadow whom I desired.'<sup>4</sup> The Apostles received this privileged gift of verdure, whose leaves could never fall, so as to provide shade for the healing of the sick.<sup>5</sup> Their fidelity of heart and the superabundance of their merits provided shade for bodily infirmities. Remain, therefore, planted in the house of the Lord so as to flourish like a palm in His halls, whence the grace of the Church may ascend for you and 'the odor of

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 2.376.

<sup>3</sup> Cant. 7.7.

<sup>4</sup> Cant. 2.3.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Acts 5.15.



thy mouth may be like apples and thy throat like the best wine,' so that you may be inebriated in Christ.<sup>6</sup>

(72) This verse serves to remind us that we should take up once more our subject wherein it was stated that the vine, too, blossomed forth by the command of God. This vine, we know, was planted by Noe after the flood. We read, in fact, that 'Noe, a husbandman, began to till the ground and planted a vineyard and drank of his wine and slept.'<sup>7</sup> Noe, therefore, was not the author of the vine, but of its planting, for he could not have planted it unless he had already found it fully grown. He is just the cultivator, therefore, of the vine. Its Author, God, who knew that wine fostered health and sharpened wits when taken sparingly, but led to vice if used immoderately, has given us this plant in the act of creation. Excess of wine He set aside as an exercise for man's will to the extent that nature's parsimony might inculcate in him the lesson of sobriety and that man might ascribe to himself the harm due to excess and the sin of intoxication. In fact, Noe himself was intoxicated and slept under the influence of wine,<sup>8</sup> so we see that he who attained to such glory through the flood exposed himself to unsightliness because of his misuse of wine. But the Lord has retained in the vine the privileges due to His creation, so that He converted its fruit for our salvation and made it possible that remission of our sins should emerge from this plant.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, Isaac spoke reverently when he said: 'The smell of Jacob is the smell of a plentiful field,'<sup>10</sup> that is, a natural odor. For what is sweeter than a plentiful field, what is more delightful than the perfume of the vine, what is more pleasing

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6 Cant. 7.8.9; 5.1.

7 Gen. 9.20,21.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Matt. 26.28.

10 Gen. 27.27.

than the blossom of the bean? Hence, before us a certain writer<sup>11</sup> has ingeniously said: 'The patriarch did not perceive the odor of vine or fig or fruit, but he breathed the perfume of virtue.' I for my part hold to the following interpretation: the odor of the land, unmixed and pure, infused not with guile, but with the truth of celestial indulgence, stands for the beauty of a prayer which blesses. Hence, what the Lord confers on us from the dew of heaven so as to give strength to the vine, to the olive and to the grain may be reckoned among our most precious benedictions.

To Him be honor, praise, and glory everlasting, from the beginning of time, now, always, and for ever. Amen.

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11 Perhaps Hippolytus or Origen; cf. Philo, *Quaestiones in Gen.* 4.214.



## BOOK IV: THE FOURTH DAY

### THE SIXTH HOMILY

#### *Chapter 1*



TO PREVENT DETERIORATION of wine it is customary for those who gather in the vintage to first clean the vessels before the wine is poured in. For of what avail is it 'to plant the vine in rows,'<sup>1</sup> to loosen the earth each year or to make furrows with a plough, to prune or to tie back the shoots and join them in marriage, as it were, to the elms,<sup>2</sup> if after such toil the wine stored away in the vessels becomes sour? In like manner, if a person desires to behold the sun rising in the morning, he proceeds to cleanse his eyes, lest there be within any speck of dust or dirt which would dull the observer's eyesight or prevent any misty darkness from obscuring the vision of the spectator.

In our reading of the Scripture passage, the sun, which before this did not exist, has now to arise. We have now passed the first day without a sun, and the second and the

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<sup>1</sup> Virgil. *Eclogues* 1.74.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 1.2.

third days we have completed still without a sun. On the fourth day God bade the luminaries of the heavens to be created: the sun, the moon and stars. The sun begins to arise. Cleanse, now, the eyes of your mind and the inward gaze of your soul, lest any mote of sin dull the keenness of your mind and disturb the aspect of your pure heart. Cleanse your ear, in order that you may receive the clear flow of holy Scripture in a clean receptacle, so that no impurity may enter therein. With its great splendor the sun precedes the day, filling the world with its great light, encompassing it with warm exhalations.

Be on your guard against stressing merely the magnitude of the sun. Its excessive brilliance may blind the eyes of your mind, as happens in the case of one who directs his sight directly at its beams. Because of the deflection of light, such a person is suddenly bereft of his sight and, if he does not turn his face and eyes in another direction, he is led to believe that nothing is visible and that he is deprived of his powers of vision. However, if he turns his eyes aside, their functional operation remains unimpaired.

See, therefore that the rays of the rising sun do not trouble your sight. For that reason, look first upon the firmament of heaven which was made before the sun; look first upon the earth which began to be visible and was already formed before the sun put in its appearance; look at the plants of the earth which preceded in time the light of the sun. The bramble preceded the sun; the blade of grass is older than the moon. Therefore, do not believe that object to be a god to which the gifts of God are seen to be preferred. Three days have passed. No one, meanwhile, has looked for the sun, yet the brilliance of light has been in evidence everywhere. For the day, too, has its light which is itself the precursor of the sun.

(2) Do not, therefore, without due consideration put your trust in the sun. It is true that it is the eye of the world,<sup>3</sup> the joy of the day, the beauty of the heavens, the charm of nature and the most conspicuous object in creation.<sup>4</sup> When you behold it, reflect on its Author. When you admire it, give praise to its Creator.

If the sun as consort of and participant in nature is so pleasing, how much goodness is there to be found in that 'Sun of Justice'?<sup>5</sup> If the sun is so swift that in its rapid course by day and night it is able to traverse all things, how great is He who is always and everywhere and fills all things with His majesty!<sup>6</sup> If that which is bidden to come forth is deemed worthy of our admiration, how much more does He surpass our admiration of whom we read: 'Who commandeth the sun and it riseth not'!<sup>7</sup> If the sun which the succession of the seasons advances or recedes<sup>8</sup> is mighty, how mighty must He be, also, who, 'when he emptied himself'<sup>9</sup> that we might be able to see Him who 'was the true light that enlightens every man who comes into this world'!<sup>10</sup> If the sun which from the interposition of the earth often undergoes eclipses is an extraordinary object, how surpassing is the majesty of Him who says: 'Yet one little while and I will move the heaven and the earth'!<sup>11</sup> The former is hidden by the earth, which in its turn cannot sustain the influence of the Lord except when it is supported by the reality of His will. If the blind suffer loss by being deprived of beholding the beauty of the sun, how great is the loss of the sinner who, despoiled of the

3 Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.197,228.

4 Cf. Mullach, *Frag. phil. graec.* I 518 vs. 25 and 513 vs. 12 (*secundus*).

5 Mal. 3.4.

6 Ps. 71.19.

7 Job 9.7.

8 See Dante, *Paradiso* 10.28-30.

9 Phil. 2.7.

10 John 1.9.

11 Agg. 2.7.



gift of the true light, is subject to the darkness of night eternal!

(3) When, therefore, you see the sun, take note, too, of the green earth which was formed before it; take note of the green herb which holds priority in rank; take note of the woods which nod their approval, because they came into being before the light of heaven. Do you think for a moment that the herb is greater than the sun or that the woods hold a position of preference? Far be it from us to prefer things that have no feeling to Him who is the provider of such a spectacle! What else, therefore, does 'the depth of the wisdom and the knowledge of God'<sup>12</sup> have in view when the woods came into being before these two luminaries of the world<sup>13</sup> (those eyes, as it were, of the celestial firmament), unless it is that all might recognize by the testimony of holy Scripture that without the aid of the sun the earth can be productive? The earth which could cause the first seeds of things to germinate without the aid of the sun can surely nourish the seeds provided for it and can, without the heat of the sun, bring forth offspring by its own fostering care.

(4) With the voice, so to speak, of her gifts does Nature cry out: Good, indeed, is the sun, but good only in respect of service, not of command; good, too, as one who assists at my fecundity, not as one who creates; good, also, as the nourisher of my fruits, not as one who is the author of them. At times the sun burns up my produce and often is the cause of injury to me, leaving me in many places without provision. I am not ungrateful to my fellow servant, one who is granted to me for my use, subject like me to toil, to vanity, and to the service of corruption! With me he groans, with me he is in travail, in order that there may come the adoption of sons and the redemption of the human race by

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<sup>12</sup> Rom. 11.33.

<sup>13</sup> See Virgil, *Georgics* 1.5,6.

which we, too, may be freed from servitude.<sup>14</sup> By my side he praises the Author; along with me he sings a hymn to the Lord God. Where his beauty is most pronounced, there I have common cause with him. Where the sun blesses, there the earth blesses, also;<sup>15</sup> with me share their blessings the fruit-bearing trees, the flocks and birds. At sea the sailor reproaches the sun and longs for me. In the hills the shepherd shuns him and hastens to my foliage, to my trees, under whose shadow he may find comfort in the heat, and hastens to my springs when he is thirsty and fatigued.

## *Chapter 2*

(5) But in case the evidence presented to your eyes may appear to be scanty, cleanse your ear and apply it to the heavenly oracles: 'On the word of two or three witnesses every word is confirmed.'<sup>1</sup> Hear God speaking: 'Let there be lights made in the firmament of heaven to give light upon the earth.'<sup>2</sup>

Who says this? God says it. And to whom is He speaking, if not to His Son? Therefore, God the Father says: 'Let the Sun be made,' and the Son made the sun, for it was fitting that the 'Sun of Justice' should make the sun of the world.<sup>3</sup> He, therefore, brought it to light. He illuminated it and granted it the power of light. Therefore the sun was made; for this reason it is also a subject, since it has been said: 'Thou hast foundeth the earth and it continueth. By thy ordinance the day goeth on: for all things serve thee.'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Rom. 8.21,22.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Ps. 148.3; Dan. 3.62.

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 18.16.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 1.14.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Mal. 4.2.

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 118.90,91.

In truth, since day serves, wherefore does not the sun which was made in the presence of the day also serve? Wherefore do not they serve, too, the moon and the stars which were made in the power of the night?<sup>5</sup> Surely the greater the beauty which the Creator has granted to them—as, for instance, an unusual brightness is bestowed on the air by the brilliance of the sun, the day has a serener light, and the darkness of night is illuminated by the flashing rays of the sun and stars, the sky twinkles with its ignited lamps as if crowned with flowers, reminding one of a paradise in bloom, resplendent with living garlands of sweet-smelling roses—the greater the beauty, then, which seems to have been granted to these, the greater is the debt they owe: ‘To whom much is given, much is required.’<sup>6</sup> And so the sun has been well called by many the adornment of the sky, the precious jewels of which are the stars.

(6) Furthermore, that we may know that the fertility of the earth is not to be ascribed to the heat of the sun, but should be assigned to the goodness of God, the Prophet says: ‘They all look to you to give them food in due time. When you give it to them, they gather it; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.’ And further on: ‘When you send forth your spirit, they are created and you renew the face of the earth.’<sup>7</sup> And in the Gospels: ‘Look at the birds of the sky: they do not sow or reap; yet your heavenly Father feeds them.’<sup>8</sup> The sun and moon are not, therefore, authors of fecundity, but God the Father through the Lord Jesus bestows on all things the gift of freedom of fertility.

(7) The Prophet has beautifully expounded the meaning of those words of his: ‘God made the sun to rule the day

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ps. 135.8,9.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 12.48.

<sup>7</sup> Ps. 103.27,28.

<sup>8</sup> Matt. 6.26.

and the moon to rule the night.’<sup>9</sup> For in the same Psalm 103 mentioned above he wrote: ‘You made the moon to mark the season; the sun knows the hour of its setting.’<sup>10</sup> When the day begins to complete its hours, the sun recognizes that its setting is due. The sun is, therefore, in the power of the day and the moon is in the power of the night, which must accommodate itself to the changes of time; now it is filled with light, and again is devoid of it.

Most authors seem, indeed, to interpret this passage mystically of Christ and the Church, maintaining that Christ had knowledge of His passion in the body when He said: ‘Father, the hour has come! Glorify thy Son,’<sup>11</sup> so that by this His setting He might grant eternal life to all men who were threatened with eternal death, and that the Church may have her seasons, namely, of persecution and of peace. The Church, like the moon, seems to lose light, but she does not. She can be cast in shadow, but she cannot lose her light. For example, the Church is weakened by the desertion of some in time of persecution, but is replenished by the witness of her martyrs. Wherefore, glorified by the victories of blood shed for Christ, she may pour forth all the more abundantly over the entire world the light of her devotedness and her faith.

In fact, the moon undergoes a diminution of its light, not, however, of its mass, at the time when it seems to give up its light in the course of the month, so that it may borrow from the sun. This phenomenon can be easily observed when the atmosphere is pure and transparent and no cloud passes before the moon, rendering it obscure. The orb of the moon remains intact, although the whole of it does not shine as does a part of it. Its size is the same as it usually appears when it is filled with light. A certain shadow makes it appear that the moon

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<sup>9</sup> Ps. 135.8.

<sup>10</sup> Ps. 103.19.

<sup>11</sup> John 17.1.

is bereft of light. Hence, it is only the horns that shine. The moon's form is circular: this fact reveals itself, even if its light is partly diminished.

### *Chapter 3*

(8) This statement can give us occasion for thought: 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate day from night,'<sup>1</sup> because it had already been said, when God created the light, that 'God separated the light from the darkness and there was evening and morning, the first day.'<sup>2</sup>

But let us reflect on the fact that the light of day is one thing and the light of the sun and moon and stars another, for the reason that the sun itself with its rays appears to add to its brilliance to the light of day. This can be seen at the dawn of day or at its setting. There is daylight, in fact, before the rising of the sun, but it is far from being brilliant. The light gleams forth more resplendently, of course, when the sun is at noon. This is pointed out by the Prophet when he says: 'And he will bring forth thy justice as the light and thy judgment as the noonday.'<sup>3</sup> He compares the justice of the saint not merely to light: he means the light of midday.

(9) Therefore, God ordained that there should not be just one indication by which to distinguish day from night. He established two signs by which light should be divided: one at the rising of the sun and another at its setting. Likewise, the rising of the stars would mark the division between the setting of the sun and the beginning of night. When the

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.14,15.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 1.4,5.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 36.6.

sun has set, there still remains some remnant of daylight until darkness covers the earth. Then the moon rises and the stars. It is very evident that the extent of the night is measured by the illumination of the moon and stars, since the sun on its rising causes the glitter of the moon and of all the stars to be invisible by day. As to the day, even the burning rays of the sun can inform us that daylight and sunlight differ both in their nature and in their aspect. The aspect of daylight is uncompounded: it merely furnishes light. The sun, on the other hand, not merely has the power of illuminating; it has also the power of heating. The sun is fiery, and fire both illuminates and burns.

Hence, when God wished to show to Moses His marvelous power for the purpose of stirring him to greater zeal in His service and of inflaming his heart to belief, He appeared to Moses in a flaming bush.<sup>4</sup> But the bush was not afire; it appeared merely to shine with the appearance of fire. One function of fire, therefore, was void, the other was in operation. The power of kindling was lacking, though the power of illumination was functioning. And so Moses marveled that fire, contrary to its nature, did not burn the bush, since this was an element which usually consumes materials of a more solid nature. The fire of the Lord illuminates, not consumes.

(10) Still, you perhaps may say, wherefore is it written: 'I am a consuming fire'?<sup>5</sup> Your suggestion is a good one. God usually consumes only the sinful. Even in the retributions dispensed to men in accordance with their merits we perceive the nature of divine fire. It illuminates some and consumes others. It illuminates the just and consumes the wicked. It does not illuminate the same people which it consumes.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Exod. 3.2.

<sup>5</sup> Deut. 4.24.



Rather, its illumination is inextinguishable in the direction of its performance toward the good, whereas its power of consumption is mighty to punish the sinner.

(11) But let us return to the division between day and night. At the coming of daylight, night is put to flight. At the departure of daylight, night appears everywhere. There is no association between light and darkness, since the Lord set this down as a principle at the beginning of His work. When He made the light, He made a distinction between light and darkness. Accordingly, in clear daylight, when the sun has sprinkled its rays upon the earth,<sup>6</sup> we see how the shadow of an object, man, or plant is separated from the light. We note how in the morning this shadow falls toward the west, while in the evening it turns toward the east and in midday toward the north. Nevertheless, the shadow is a thing apart and has nothing in common with the light. In a similar way, night seems to yield to daylight and to verge away from its light. In fact, as has been pointed out by more expert authors who have precedence over us whether in time or in ability, night is a shadow of the earth.

The shadow adheres and stays close to the body in accordance with nature, so much so that artists strive to depict the shadows of objects in their paintings. They maintain that it is the province of art not to ignore a quality inherent in nature. An artist whose painting does not represent the requisite shadows may be likened to one who contravenes the natural law. When, then, an object in daylight happens to face the sun, there arises a shadow of that part from which the sunlight is deflected. In the same way, at sunset, when the earth stands in the way of the light of day or of the sunlight, there is an effect of shadow. Hence it is clear that night is caused by the shadow of the earth.

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6 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 9.461.

*Chapter 4*

(12) God made the sun, moon, and stars, and allotted to them the measurement of time, the sun for the daytime and the moon and stars for night. The former augments the beauty of the day; the latter illumine the shadow and the darkness: 'Let them serve as signs and for the fixing of seasons, days and years.'<sup>1</sup> The sun, moon, and stars divide time in diverse fashion, but in an equal manner in respect to changes based on months, and 'they serve as signs' for them, also. We cannot deny that some signs are formed from the sun and moon together. The Lord said: 'And there will be signs in the sun, moon and stars.'<sup>2</sup> And when the Apostles asked for a sign of His coming, He replied: 'The sun will be darkened and the moon will not give her light and the stars will fall from heaven.'<sup>3</sup> These, He said, were to be the signs of a fulfillment in the future, but for us in our anxiety these should serve as an appropriate measure of time.

(13) In fact, some men have attempted to set down the characteristics of birth days and the future state of each newborn child. Yet a prognostication of this sort is both vain and useless to those who seek it and is an impossibility for those who promise it. What is so inane as to suppose that everyone should be convinced that he is what his birth has made him? No one, then, ought to change his condition of life and his habits or strive to become better, but, rather, remain in that conviction. In which case you cannot commend the good nor condemn the wicked, since each seems to comply with the destiny of his birth. And wherefore has the Lord laid down rewards for the good or punishment for the wicked if their habits are prescribed by fate and their

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.14.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 21.25.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 24.29.

social behavior depends on the course of the stars? And what else does this lead to other than to deprive man of his humanity,<sup>4</sup> if no room is left for character, no outlet for education or for freedom of action?

How many do we see snatched from amid their vices and sins to be converted to a better life? It was certainly not the circumstances of their birth which freed and called the Apostles from the company of sinners. Rather, the coming of Christ sanctified them and the hour of His Passion redeemed them from death. The condemned thief who was crucified with our Lord passed over into everlasting paradise, not because of a favorable nativity, but because of his confession of faith.<sup>5</sup> It was not the influence of his natal star, but the offense of having neglected the divine prophecy which cast Jonas into the sea. A whale which received him and after three days vomited him forth,<sup>6</sup> as a symbol of future mystery, and preserved him for the service of prophecy. Peter was rescued from impending death in prison by the angel of Christ,<sup>7</sup> not by the disposition of the stars. Blindness converted Paul to grace when he was struck by a viper.<sup>8</sup> When he was a victim of shipwreck he was saved, not by his natal star, but by the merits of his piety.<sup>9</sup>

What shall we say of those who by the prayers of the Apostles arose from the dead?<sup>10</sup> Was it their natal star or the grace of the Apostles that restored them? What need was there for them to resort to fasting and expose themselves to danger, if they could obtain what they desired simply by virtue of their natal star? If they had put their trust in that, they would never, while awaiting the destinies

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4 Cf. Cicero, *De finibus* 5.35.

5 Cf. Luke 23.42.

6 Jonas 1.2-15; 2.11.

7 Cf. Acts 12.7.

8 Cf. Acts 9.8, 18.

9 Cf. Acts 28.3.

10 Cf. Acts 9.40.

meted out to them by fate, have reached such perfection of grace.

(14) What about the impossibility of all this? In fact, if we allow some force to their arguments for the sake of refuting them and not for the sake of proof, they say that the time of our birth is of great importance. This time should be determined strictly within the limits of moments of the smallest extent, because, if no heed is paid to exactness, the greatest differences do ensue. Only the tiniest moment separates the nativity of the helpless from that of the powerful, of the needy from the rich, of the innocent from the guilty. It often happens that at the same hour is born one who is destined to a long life and one who will die in early childhood, if other circumstances turn out to be dissimilar and if there is just one single point of difference.

Let them reconstruct the following if they would. Suppose a woman is giving birth to a child. As a matter of course the midwife first observes the child. She looks for his cry as giving evidence of life and notes whether the child is a male or a female. How many moments will you allow for all these acts? Suppose that there is an astrologer near at hand. Can a man be present at a childbirth? While the midwife is giving information and while the Chaldean is listening and setting up the horoscope, the fates of the new-born child have already entered the space of the lot belonging to another person. It follows that while an investigation is being made regarding the fate of one person, the nativity of another is in the process of being established.

Even suppose that what they maintain concerning fate and nativity is true, their conclusions cannot, however, be true. A moment passes away: 'Time is flying beyond recall.'<sup>11</sup> There is no doubt that time is made up of moments and of 'a twinkling of an eye.' I am led to believe that assumption

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<sup>11</sup> Virgil, *Georgics* 3.284.

since we shall all arise, as the Apostle testifies, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye: 'Behold I tell you a mystery: we shall all indeed rise, but we shall not all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet and the dead shall rise incorruptible and we shall be changed.'<sup>12</sup> Between the time when the child was born, taken up, and laid down again; between the time of his cry and the report of it, how many moments do you think have elapsed!

So far I have only touched the surface of this question. The upholders of this system divide that well-known circle of twelve signs, which has such vital importance for them, into twelve parts. Furthermore, as the sun travels over the twelfth part of that indescribable sphere—it completes its course in this way in the period of a year—they divide each one of these twelve parts into thirty smaller divisions which the Greeks call *μοῖραι*, and each of these smaller divisions they separate in turn into sixty other individual parts. How incomprehensible all this is! To think that the moment of a nativity is made up of a sixtieth of a sixtieth part and that such is exactly the motion and the aspect of each sign occurring at the actual moment of a nativity! Wherefore, since it is impossible to take such tenuous moments of time into account and since the slightest variation introduces an enormous error, the whole affair is based on mere phantasy. Its advocates are ignorant of their own destiny. How, then, can they know that of other men? They do not know what is in store for themselves. Can they announce the future of others? It is ridiculous to believe this, because if they were able to do so, they would inevitably foresee what the future held for themselves.

(15) Now how stupid it is to think that if a person were to say that he was born under the sign of Aries and should suppose that, just because such an animal is pre-eminent in

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Cor. 15.51.



his own herd, he himself would turn out to be conspicuous for his wisdom! Or that he would become quite rich for the reason that the Ram possesses by nature a raiment and every year puts on a new and costly garment. Wherefore this man would appear to be one who is destined to be no stranger to profit and gain. In a similar way they form their conclusions regarding the signs of the Bull and the Fishes. From the nature of ordinary animals they consider that the significance of the movements of the heavens and of the signs can be interpreted. And so our food and our sustenance have established for us the destinies of our lives, that is to say, the Ram, the Bull, and the Fish imprint on us the norms of our character! Wherefore, then, do they summon from heaven the causes for material things and the basis for this life of ours, when at the same time they share the causes of their own motion with the celestial signs, arguing from the very qualities of ordinary human food? They maintain that a person born under the Ram is generous because the ram yields its wool without resistance. They prefer to ascribe that kind of virtue to the nature of an ordinary animal than to heaven, from which comes to us the gleam of sunshine, and often, too, a downfall of rain. They assert that those who at their birth fall under the aspect of the Bull will be subject to toil and will endure servitude,<sup>13</sup> because that laborious animal willingly submits his neck to the yoke. They say, too, that those whom at their birth the Scorpion has encircled will turn out to be assassins<sup>14</sup> and that they will spit out the venom of wickedness—a venom which is in essence poisonous.

Why, therefore, do you pretend on the basis of the significance of celestial signs to give an authoritative standard for living? Why do you present certain nonsensical facts as proof

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Manilius, *Astronomica* 4.143.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Petronius, *Cena Trim.* 39.



of your assertion? If the movements of the heavens take their character from the moral qualities typical of such animals, then heaven itself seems to be subject to the influences of bestial natures, since from these natures it supposedly has received a substantial and vital force which it would communicate to men. But if this is a far cry from what is the truth, so much the more ridiculous is it to think that these men, deprived as they are of any solid basis of fact, should have recourse to this assumption in order to give credence to their arguments.

(16) Next let us consider the fact that they give the name of 'planet' to those signs which by their movements determine the destinies of our lives. Either, as the name indicates, the planets wander for all time, or, if we follow their own statements, they move along in rapid motion. We are told that the planets in innumerable circular movements change their positions ten thousand times, or, if this seems incredible, show manifold aspects each day. Whatever may be the case, it cannot be accepted that such a wandering course and such a swift motion can be the means of establishing a fixed and immovable lot as a basis for our lives. Again, they maintain that the movements of the planets are not all equal. Some move around with more speed, others are slower in motion, so that they often at the same time gaze upon and hide from each other in the course of their transits.

(17) They say that it makes considerable difference whether favorable or unfavorable and harmful signs look at the inception of a birth and the difference in birth lies in the fact that the aspect of a favorable sign confers very great benefits, while that of an unfavorable sign brings with it considerable harm. Such are the terms which they use of these very signs that they hold in veneration. I feel it necessary to make use of the vocabulary of those whose assertions I discuss, lest they proceed to remind me that their argu-

ments have been ignored rather than utterly refuted. For example, that wandering and swift movement to which I have made reference escapes their comprehension in their attempt to establish to a nicety as an aspect of a favorable sign a point or moment of incomprehensible time. It frequently happens, in fact, that the threat of an unfavorable sign enters as a disturbing factor in the midst of their calculations.

What wonder, then, if men are deceived when favorable signs are defamed? If the very nature of these signs is believed to be unfavorable, then God, who is supreme, is accused of being the creator of evil and responsible for wickedness. If, in fact, the signs are considered to have taken on by their own volition the power of harming the innocent and injuring those who are conscious of not having up to that time done any vile deed for which a punishment is assigned even before the fault is committed, what, I repeat, is so irrational, exceeding in that respect even the irrationality of of beasts, as to attribute the practice of deceit or of good will, not to the merits of men, but to the movements of the signs? He was in no way guilty, it is said, but an unfavorable sign looked upon him! He came in contact with the star of Saturn. On the other hand, by a very slight deviation, according to their calculations, bad omens are shunned and wrong-doing avoided.

(18) This wisdom of theirs is similar to that encountered in a spider's web from which a gnat or fly cannot extricate itself once it has become entangled therein.<sup>15</sup> However, if an animal more robust by nature is seen to enter the web, right away it passes through, breaks the feeble strands, and destroys the useless snares. Such are the nets of the Chaldeans. In these nets the weak are trapped, but those of a more robust nature find no obstacle there. You who have more

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<sup>15</sup> See A. J. Festugière. *TAPA* 85 (1954) 67.

strength of character say to the astrologers when you see them: You weave spider's webs which cannot have any use or binding force when a person strikes against them, not in a moment of weakness like a gnat or a fly, but like a sparrow or a dove, rending their meshes in the swiftness of their winged flight.

In fact, what sensible man would believe that signs, which frequently change from day to day and so many times return on themselves, can by their movements denote what are the indications of future power? If such were the case, what combinations indicating royal birth would be announced day after day! As a consequence, kings would be born every day. Succession to the throne would not be transmitted to sons. Rather, at all time men of diverse social conditions would arise who would lay claim to the rights of imperial power. What king, therefore, would care to think under these circumstances of the birth of a son to succeed him, if the royal power is destined for someone else and if it is not within his own power to hand down to his own children the imperial succession?

We read, of course, that 'Abia begot Asaph, Asaph begot Josaphat, Josaphat begat Joram, Joram begat Ozias,'<sup>16</sup> and so up to the time of the captivity every succession took place through a line of kings of equal rank and honor. Do you think that, because they were kings, they had the power actually to govern their own movements—movements which were committed to the control of the celestial signs? What human being can have dominion over these?

(19) Again, if all our acts and deeds depend on the fates acquired at our birth and not on principles of morality, why are laws established and statutes promulgated by which punishment is meted out to the wicked and security bestowed

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<sup>16</sup> Matt. 1.7,8.

on the innocent? Why is pardon not granted to the accused, since, to be sure, they fell into crime by reason, as is maintained, of necessity and not by an act of their own will? Why does the farmer toil and not rather wait until it is time to convey into his storehouses the produce for which he has not labored, relying on the prerogatives of his birth? If he was destined by birth to be endowed with wealth without the expenditure of labor, he should undoubtedly wait until the earth brings forth fruit spontaneously without seed. If such were the case he should not sink his ploughshare into the earth or put his hands on the curved scythe or undergo the expense of harvesting the grapes. Rather, the wine would without effort flow plenteously into his stock of jars. Without effort, too, he would let the wild olive berry exude its oil without the labor of grafting upon the trunk of the olive tree. In the same way a merchant who travels over the wide seas would not be in dread of the perils that threaten his own life, for it is within his power, because of a certain destiny allotted to him at birth, to come without labor into a wealth of treasure.

But this is far from the accepted opinion. As a matter of fact, the farmer cleaves the earth 'with deep-driven plough'; 'stripped he ploughs, stripped he sows'; stripped in the glowing 'heat he thrashes on the floor the parched ears.'<sup>17</sup> The merchant, impatient when the east winds are blowing, ploughs the sea often when the course is unsafe. Insolent and rash men such as these are condemned by the Prophet, who says:<sup>18</sup> 'Be thou ashamed, O Sidon, the sea speaketh,' that is to say, if dangers do not move you, then shame can check and modesty confound you. 'Be thou ashamed, O Sidon,' in which there is no place for virtue, no care for safety, no young men exercised in arms and ready to fight in defense of

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<sup>17</sup> Virgil, *Georgics* 1.45, 298, 299.

<sup>18</sup> Isa. 23.4, 3.

their country. They are anxiously and entirely preoccupied with gain and the benefits derived from commerce. 'What the merchant sows, so does he reap.'

What reward is there for a Christian, if in his activities and labors he follows the dictates of necessity, not those of his own free will? There, where destiny decides, personal initiative is held in no esteem.

### *Chapter 5*

(20) We have spoken at length on this subject and do not desire to say any more, lest some people may form the opinion that what was taken up merely for the purpose of refutation has been presented for the purpose of publicizing it. As a matter of fact, how can these subjects which as children we held in ridicule now seriously enter our thoughts in our declining years? Therefore, let us now direct our pen to what remains of our reading of Scripture.

(21) 'Let there be lights to serve as signs and for the fixing of seasons, days and years,'<sup>1</sup> He said. We have already discussed the subject of 'signs.'

What are seasons but successive changes, that is, winter, spring, summer, and autumn? During these seasons the passage of the sun is either swift or slow, scarcely touching us at one time with its rays; at another, burning us with its heat. And so we have winter when the sun lingers in the southern regions. When the sun is somewhat far away, the earth grows rigid with frost and is stiffened by cold. The earth is covered by all-pervading nocturnal shadows, so that the nights are much longer in extent than are the days. From this fact it happens that during the storms of winter a great amount of snow and rain is precipitated. When, how-

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.14.



ever, the sun, leaving the southern regions, returns to its position over the earth, the duration of day and night becomes equal. Then, the more it prolongs its sojourn, the more it gradually tempers the air with its heat and with the clemency of its atmosphere, which fosters all things and forces them once more to reproduction. The result is that the earth germinates and the seeds released from the furrows come to life again, the trees sprout and in their effort to perpetuate their kind successively each year all species of terrestrial and marine life propagate themselves. But when the sun rises toward the summer solstice in the north, the daytime is lengthened, thereby narrowing and restricting the period of night. And so, the more assiduously the sun links itself and mingles with our atmosphere, the more completely does it furnish heat to the air and at the same time dry up the moisture of the earth, thus causing the seeds to sprout forth and the offspring of the forests to ripen, as it were, into manhood. At the time when the sun becomes warmer, the shadows at noon become shorter, inasmuch as the sun in this region shines from a position high above us.

(22) Since the Synagogue says in the Cantic of Canticles: 'Show me, O thou whom my soul has loved, where thou feedest, where thou liest at midday, lest perchance I begin to wander after the flocks of thy companions,'<sup>2</sup> that is: Announce to me, O Christ, whom has my soul loved. Why not rather whom [my soul] loves? The Synagogue loved, but the Church loves and never changes her affection for Christ. 'Where thou feedest,' we read, 'where thou liest at midday.' I desire to follow you into those places like a foster-child, to whom I once held fast as if in wedlock and I wish to search for your flock because I have lost mine. You feed at midday in the Church's pasture where Justice

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<sup>2</sup> Cant. 1.6.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Ps. 36.6.



shines, where Judgment gleams like the noonday,<sup>3</sup> where no shadow is seen, where the days are longer, because the Sun of Justice dwells therein for a longer time just as in the months of summer. The day of the Lord is, therefore, not brief. It is long because it has been written: 'Before the great day of the Lord doth come.'<sup>4</sup> Hence Jacob says: 'All the days of my life are brief and evil,'<sup>5</sup> for a dubious light is evil. Brief days are, therefore, of dubious light and are not luminous. The contrary is true of the long days, as many people who live in warm countries realize from experience. Accordingly, the Synagogue in its brief and evil days was in very deep shade. Its type is often expressed in the person of Jacob or of his people. It did not behold the Sun of Justice shining from overhead, but, rather, since winter was at hand, shining from the direction of the south. But this is said to the Church: 'The winter is now past, is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land, the time of the harvest has come.'<sup>6</sup> Winter existed before the coming of Christ; after His coming, the flowers of the spring and summer's harvest appear. Since it faces the light shining from the south and from the region of the converted Gentiles, the Synagogue lies in shadow. The Gentiles 'who sat in darkness'—the Gentiles, the people of the nations, a confused people—'have seen a great light; to them that sat in the region and shadow of death, a light has arisen.'<sup>7</sup> This is a great and divine light which is not darkened by any shadow of death. So it shines from above, because through the voice of Zachary it is written: 'Wherewith the Orient from on high has visited us, to shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.'<sup>8</sup> There is, of course, a shadow of salvation, not of

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<sup>4</sup> Joel 2.31.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 47.9.

<sup>6</sup> Cant. 2.11.

<sup>7</sup> Matt. 4.16; Isa. 9.2.

<sup>8</sup> Luke 1.78.

death, as has been said: 'Thou shalt protect me under the shadow of thy wings'<sup>9</sup>—'shadow,' in fact, because it is of the body; 'shadow,' too, because it is of the cross. It is the shadow of salvation, because in it was the remission of sins and the resurrection of the dead.

(23) We can state the problem succinctly in the following way: winter days are short while their shadows are long; summer days are long, whereas their shadows are short. In the middle of the day a shadow is shorter than it is at its beginning or end. This is the situation with us who live in the west. However, there are people living in the southern regions who for two days in the year are without shadows, since the sun's rays strike from a position directly overhead, thus illuminating everything on all sides. Hence, these are called in Greek 'Ascii.'<sup>10</sup> Many also report the fact that in that region the sun is so perpendicularly situated above that water can be seen gleaming deep down through the narrow openings of a well. In the south there is report of a people who are called 'Amphiscii'<sup>11</sup> because they cast a shadow on each side.

The person, in fact, who travels in the direction of the sun casts his shadow behind him. This happens when he advances toward the east in the morning hours or toward the south at midday or toward the west at sunset. From three directions, therefore, may the sun strike a person; from the east, the south, and the west. Our shadows are behind us in the morning and in the evening, and at noon the situation is similar. Moreover, the sun does not reach us from the north. For that reason, if you face northward in the morning or in the evening or at midday you cast no shadow behind you. Only those people who live in the southern regions of this world which we inhabit are able, it appears, to cast their

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9 Ps. 16.8.

10 Men without a shadow.

11 Men with double shadows.

shadows in a southerly direction. This is said to happen in the height of summer when the sun is advancing toward the north.

For us there is the relief of autumn. At its coming the excessive heat of summer is broken. Autumn, relaxing its warmth and moderating its temperature to what is equable, hands us over without malice or harm to the breezes of winter.

(24) 'Let there be [lights] for the fixing of days,'<sup>12</sup> says the Scripture—not that they may make the days, but that they may have a principal part in their making, so that the sun may illuminate the dawn with more generous gifts and with its light can designate the course of the entire day. In such a sense some interpret the words of the Prophet: 'The sun to rule the day, the moon and the stars to rule the night,'<sup>13</sup> as they cast their lights around.

The sun and the moon, too, were designed 'to fix the years.' The moon in twelve times thirty days, according to the Hebrews, completes the year with the addition of a few days, and according to the Romans with an intercalary day added every fourth year. The solstitial year is that portion of time which corresponds to the completion of a period in which the sun makes a circuit through all the signs and then returns to the point of its departure.<sup>14</sup>

## Chapter 6

(25) God made, therefore, these two great luminaries. We may assume that by their own right they are great and not merely by comparison with other objects such as the broad

<sup>12</sup> Gen. 1.14.

<sup>13</sup> Ps. 135.8,9.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Isidore, *Etymol.* 5.36.3.

heavens and the mighty sea. We must admit the mightiness of that sun which fills with its heat the entire earth as the moon, too, fills not only the earth with its light, but also this atmosphere of ours, the sea, and the firmament. In whatever part of the heavens these lights may be, they illuminate everything and are observed equally by all. So much is this true that people of every race believe that these luminaries delight in lingering in their respective native countries. They believe that they are present there only, furnishing light to them alone, whereas these lights shine on all without distinction. Everyone is convinced, moreover, that he is nearer these luminaries than any other individual.

As a proof of its great size one may note that the orb of the moon seems to all men to be of the same dimensions. Although at times its light may increase or diminish, its appearance on any one night is the same for me as it is for all men. If it were to appear smaller to distant people and if to people living nearer it would seem to shine more brilliantly, we would then have clear indications of the narrow compass of its range and its extent. The reason is that all objects are considered by us to be smaller when we are some distance away from them, while other objects are regarded as larger if seen closer at hand. The size of an object increases in proportion as the beholder comes nearer. The sun's rays are neither nearer to any one individual nor more remote. In like manner, the sphere of the moon has for all men the same size. The sun when it rises appears at the same instant alike to the people of India and of Britain. When it sets, the sun does not appear to be smaller to the inhabitants of the east than it does to those of the west. When the sun rises it does not seem to the people of the west to be smaller than it does to the people of the east. As Scripture says: 'As far as the east is from the west.'<sup>1</sup> These points are distant

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1 Ps. 102.12.

one from the other but that is not true in regard to the sun. It does not lie nearer any other object nor more remote from it.

(26) Do not be disturbed by the fact that the sun on rising seems to be about a cubit in extent. Rather, consider that between the sun and the earth there lies a space which our vision, because of its weakness, cannot penetrate without a loss of effectiveness. Our vision is clouded. Are we to conclude that the sun or moon is clouded, also? Our vision is limited. Does that make more limited the things that we see? The apparent size of an object is diminished, not the real. We ought not to ascribe to the luminaries a weakness which is due merely to our senses.

Our sight deceives us. Therefore, do not put trust in its testimony. The heavenly bodies present the appearance of smallness, but their form is actually not so. If from the top of a mountain you wish to view a plain before your eyes with cattle feeding therein, will they not take on the appearance of ants?<sup>2</sup> If you should look far out to sea from some point on shore, will not the largest ships with their sails flashing amid the blue of the sea appear to you in the distance like doves in flight? More than that, even the islands with their extensive areas which deck the sea seem circumscribed in a narrow space, taking on a smooth appearance instead of a rough one, a look of density instead of its contrary! Take account, therefore, of the weakness of your eyesight and like a just judge rely on yourself, putting trust as the same time in those things which we affirm to be true.<sup>3</sup>

(27) Do you want to estimate the huge size of the sun with your bodily eyes as well as with the eyes of your mind? Consider the extent in which the spheres of the stars seem to cover and illuminate with lights innumerable the firma-

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Lucretius 2.334,335.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 4.353-363.

ment of the heavens. Yet, for all that, they do not succeed in dispersing the clouds of the sky and the darkness of night-time.<sup>4</sup> As soon as the sunrise has sent forth its standards, all the glowing stars vanish beneath the flashing rays of one luminary, the surroundings are unveiled, and the sky is flooded with a purple flush of light. The dawn at its inception is still breathing. In a flash the splendor of the sun's fiery rays emerge and the breeze's sweet breath is a forerunner of the rising sun. Tell me, if you please, how could the sun illuminate the great orb of the earth unless it, too, was mighty?

(28) What shall I say of the Creator's great moderation and control? He conferred such measure on the sun's operation that its fiery flame to all appearances has not by its pervading heat burned up the veins of the earth and the entire structure of matter?<sup>5</sup> Again, in such an extensive world the sun has not by becoming cool ceased from the act of infusing the 'seed of heat'<sup>6</sup> into the earth. Rather, thrusting aside infecundity and want, it has effectively bestowed on the earth the blessing of warmth with its accompanying fertility.

### Chapter 7

(29) What we have stated in regard to her consort and brother applies in similar fashion to the moon, since the latter assumes the same offices as her brother, namely that of illuminating the darkness, cherishing the seeds, and increasing the produce of the soil. She has functions, also, which are different from her brother's. The moisture which throughout the day the heat has absorbed from the earth is

4 Cf. Horace, *Odes* 1.7.15.

5 Cf. Lucretius 2.61 (*species rerum*).

6 Lucretius 1.902; 6.200,201.



replaced in the short space of night in the form of dew,<sup>1</sup> of which the moon is said to be a generous dispenser. Hence, when the night is clear and the moon shines the whole night long, a larger amount of dew is then said to fall. Many reclining in the open air have experienced the phenomenon of collecting more dew on their heads, the longer they rested in the moonlight. Wherefore, in the Canticles, Christ speaks to the Church: 'For my head is full of dew and my locks of the drops of the night.'<sup>2</sup>

Then, again, the moon goes through a process of waxing and waning. It becomes smaller when as a new moon it rises, at which point it gradually approaches a fuller form. In this we can see a great mystery. The elements are affected by the waning of the moon. After a period of exhaustion, strength is regained at the time of the moon's waxing. We may note this process in two instances: in the brains of living things and in the amount of water in shellfish. In fact, oysters and many other kinds of shellfish are said to be more developed at the time when the moon is becoming fuller. The same phenomenon is related by those who have made special investigation into the internal structure of trees. We see, therefore, that the waxing and waning of the moon is not the result of weakness, but of plan and purpose. If it were not that the Creator had thought fit to bestow unusual excellence and beauty on such significant changes, these changes would not have been allotted to matter.

(30) Some learned men, including some who are Christians, have claimed that the air usually changes at the rising of the moon. Yet, if these lunar changes should result in some unusual upheaval, then clouds would conceal the sky and rain would fall at every rising of the moon. So, when there was talk the previous day of a much desired rainfall,

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1 Cf. Virgil, *Georgics*, 2.202.

2 Cant. 5.2.

some person remarked, 'See, the new moon will bring it.' Although we were all eager for rain, I had no desire to believe that such assertions are true. Hence, I was delighted when no rain fell, until it was granted as a consequence of the Church's prayers. Wherefore, it was made manifest that one should not expect rain to follow the new moon, but that it should be granted by a provident and beneficent Creator.

In fact, although channels of water during other phases of the moon rise and afterwards sink to their former level or even rush along violently without any external force, these same bodies of water remain calm at the time of the new moon before its light is observable.<sup>3</sup> When in the course of time the moon comes into view, then the waters return to their accustomed ebb and flow. Again, during those days when the new moon is not in evidence the ebb tide, which is reputed to exist in the ocean, is said to follow its usual course. On the occasion of the moon's rise, according to report, clear indications of change make their appearance. To be more precise, the western sea,<sup>4</sup> towards which the ebb tide directs itself, rises and falls with greater force, as if it were driven backward and forward by the same lunar exhalations, until it ultimately falls back into its normal and accustomed channel.

### Chapter 8

(31) Hence, if you wonder at the fact that the moon can suffer a loss of light while it has in itself the power to produce change, consider that we are here in the presence of a

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Eclogues* 2.26.

<sup>4</sup> The Atlantic Ocean; see S. Giet, *Basile de Césarée* (Paris 1949) 382 nn. 2-4.

great mystery. From this let men deduce the lesson that nothing can exist in the universe, be it human or any other created thing, which shall not at some time pass away.<sup>1</sup> Even the moon, to which the Lord has granted the important office of illuminating the whole world, goes through the process of waxing and waning. All things, which spring from nothing, reach their perfection and again diminish in perfection, being subject to decline. Hence we are told: 'Heaven and earth shall pass away.'<sup>2</sup> Why, then, do we not moderate our emotions and face adversities with courage? For He who has created all things from nothing has the power to bear you aloft to the summit of perfection. In a similar manner, we should control our feelings of joy in prosperity and not take pride in our positions of wealth and power. Likewise, we should not boast of our physical strength or beauty which is liable both to corruption and to constant change. Rather, we should strive for that beauty of soul which endures into future time.

If you are afflicted with sadness at the sight of the waning of the moon 'which repairs its losses' and renews itself,<sup>3</sup> all the more ought you to be saddened if your soul, which has been filled with the fruit of virtue, should frequently afterward change its intent and purpose by an attitude of inconstancy and heedlessness. This is the height of stupidity and ignorance, for, as Scripture says: 'A fool is changed as the moon.'<sup>4</sup> Hence, a wise man does not change with the moon: 'He shall continue with the sun.'<sup>5</sup>

Wherefore the moon does not partake of folly, because the moon does not change like the fool, but the fool like the moon. The seed of the just remains 'as the moon, perfect for

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1 Cf. Horace, *Odes* 2.11.10-12.

2 Matt. 24.35.

3 Horace, *Odes* 4.7.13.

4 Eccli. 27.12.

5 Ps. 71.5.

ever and a faithful witness in heaven.’<sup>6</sup> To perform one’s function is one thing; to have no fixed beliefs and to be carried away by unstable whims and emotions presents a situation that is quite different. The moon toils for you<sup>7</sup> and by reason of the will of God is made subject: ‘For creation is made subject to vanity, not by its own will but by reason of him who made it subject in hope.’<sup>8</sup> It is you who undergoes changes of your own volition, not the moon. The moon ‘groans and travails in pain’<sup>9</sup> in its changes. You, without understanding, often find joy in this. The moon frequently awaits your release from sin, that it may be released from the servitude in which all creation shares. But you place obstacles to your release from sin and to the moon’s freedom. The fact that you yourself still await that conversion which fails to come,<sup>10</sup> whereas the moon suffers change, is, then, the result, not of the moon’s folly, but of your’s.

(32) Your opinion of the moon should be based, not on the observation of your eyes, but on the insight of your mind. The moon diminishes in size so as to make an addition to the sum of physical phenomenon. This, therefore, is a great mystery. He who has allotted His gifts to all things has allotted this to the moon. He has emptied it so as to replenish it. He has even ‘emptied Himself’<sup>11</sup> that He might replenish all, for He emptied Himself that He might come down for us. He came down for us that He might ascend for all. It is written, in fact: ‘He who ascended above the heavens that he might fill all things.’<sup>12</sup> Hence, one of the Apostles says: ‘For of his fullness we have all received.’<sup>13</sup> The moon, there-

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6 Ps. 88.38.

7 Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 2.478.

8 Rom. 8.20.

9 Rom. 8.22.

10 Cf. Rom. 8.19.

11 Phil. 2.7.

12 Eph. 4.12.

13 John 1.16.

fore, has made known the mysteries of Christ. It is no slight thing in which He has placed His sign. No slight thing is that which contains the type of His beloved Church, as the Prophet points out when he says: 'In his days shall justice spring up and abundance of peace till the moon be taken away.'<sup>14</sup> And in the Canticles the Lord says of His spouse: 'Who is she that looks forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, excellent as the sun?'<sup>15</sup>

Deservedly is the moon compared to the Church, who has shone over the entire world and says as she illuminates the darkness of this world: 'The night is far advanced, the day is at hand.'<sup>16</sup> Fittingly does she say: 'She that looks forth,' as if looking from a higher position on one's own, in accordance with the statement: 'The Lord hath looked down from heaven upon the children of men.'<sup>17</sup> Looking down, then, the Church has, like the moon, her frequent risings and settings. She has grown, however, by her settings and has by their means merited expansion at a time when she is undergoing diminution through persecution and while she is being crowned by the martyrdom of her faithful. This is the real moon which from the perpetual light of her own brother has acquired the light of immortality and grace. Not from her own light does the Church gleam, but from the light of Christ. From the Sun of Justice has her brilliance been obtained, so that it is said: 'It is now no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me.'<sup>18</sup>

Happy, in truth, is that which merited such an honor! Wherefore I would not call you happy by reason of your renewals, but by the fact that you are a type of the Church.

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<sup>14</sup> Ps. 71.7.

<sup>15</sup> Cant. 6.9.

<sup>16</sup> Rom. 13.12.

<sup>17</sup> Ps. 13.2.

<sup>18</sup> Gal. 2.20.

In the former case you are but a servant; in the latter, our beloved!

(33) How ridiculous is the current belief that you can be brought to earth by magical charms! These are old wives' tales, the gossip of the common crowd. Who would believe that a work of God assigned to such important service could be affected by the superstitions of the Chaldeans? He who was brought down not by magical charms but by his own will, who 'disguises himself as an angel of light,'<sup>19</sup> may very well have fallen from heaven. To be sure, there are those who believe that the Church, too, can be moved from her place and position. There are many men who provoke the Church, but the charms of the magician can not harm her. Magical chants are of no avail there where the canticles of Christ are chanted daily. Her own chanter is Jesus, our Lord, through whom magical charms and serpents' poison were made void. She is like a serpent which placed on high devoured the snakes,<sup>20</sup> and, although a deadly Egyptian chant be murmured,<sup>21</sup> its force is lost at the utterance of the name of Christ. So, too, Paul blinded Elymas,<sup>22</sup> thus depriving him of his eyesight and of his futile magic powers at one and the same time. In like manner, Peter cast down to the ground Simon, who by the evil power of his charms sought to soar aloft by magic to the heights of heaven.

### *Chapter 9*

(34) I feel sure that the fourth day has come to a close in a wonderful way. How does it happen, then, that many

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<sup>19</sup> 2 Cor. 11.14.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Num. 21.8; John 3.14.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Exod. 7.11.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Acts 13.11.



people generally avoid the fourth day and think that it is useless to begin anything in association with a number with which the entire world blazoned forth in a new light? Do they believe that the sun came into being under inauspicious circumstances? And how is it possible for a person to predict good fortune for another, if he himself is unable to choose for himself the day of his own birth? How can they make known the horoscope of a person without knowing anything of his birth? What do we say of the moon which rises on the fourth day?<sup>1</sup> Does not the fourteenth day indicate for us the day of salvation?<sup>2</sup> Is the date on which is celebrated the mystery of the Redemption an occasion for our displeasure? Hence, the demons are responsible for attempts to avoid the number four, for in it their wickedness was destroyed. And so the Gentiles maintain that nothing should be initiated with it, because they know that then for the first time their schemes began to be of no avail. Moreover, the Gentile race had already come into the fold of the Church.

If the moon is at its fourth rising be 'clear and with undimmed horns,'<sup>3</sup> it is thought that this is an indication that the remaining days of the month will be serene up to the very end. To think that people are unwilling to start anything on those days which are destined to be followed by calm weather!

But we must in the midst of this discourse of ours be on our guard lest the fourth day should suddenly come to an end. 'Longer shadows are falling from the mountain-heights,'<sup>4</sup> as the light becomes dim and the shades of evening grow more dense.

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1 Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 1.432.

2 The Jewish Christians observed the feast of the Resurrection on the 14th day of the month Nisan.

3 Virgil, *Georgics* 1.433-435.

4 Virgil, *Eclogues* 1.84.

## BOOK FIVE: THE FIFTH DAY

### THE SEVENTH HOMILY

#### *Chapter 1*

**T**HE ENTIRE EARTH was now arrayed in its verdant garb of diverse plants. The sun, too, and the moon, those twin luminaries, and the stars in their splendor shone forth in the heavens. A third element still remained, in which the blessing of life was to be bestowed by the gift of God. All things on earth are being sustained and nourished by the air above.<sup>1</sup> The earth opening up the seeds gives life to everything. Then under the command of God's word, it blossomed forth at the gift of creative life. Water alone seemed not yet to have been affected by the generosity of God's gift. There still was something which waited for the hands of the Creator. With the water He saved a certain fitting and special endowment which He would set aside for the functions appropriate to it. The earth was the first element on which the boon of life was conferred, but this life has no animating soul. The water, in its turn, was bidden to produce that which would bestow the force and dignity of

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.726.

something that is alive—something that is provided with a sense of self-preservation and with the instinct of shrinking from death.

(2) And God also said: 'Let the waters abound with life and above the earth let winged creatures fly below the firmament of the heavens.'<sup>2</sup>

At this command the waters immediately poured forth their offspring. The rivers were in labor. The lakes produced their quota of life. The sea itself began to bear all manner of reptiles and to send forth according to its kind whatever was there created. The tiny creeks and the muddy marshes were not without exercising the power of creation granted to them. Fish leaped from the rivers. Dolphins frolicked in the waves. Shell-fish clung to the rocks. Oysters adhered to the depths and the sea-urchins waxed strong.

Alas, enticement, the mother of our life of ease, existed before the creation of man! Before man there existed things to delight us! The temptation of man antedated his creation. But this was not nature's fault. Nature gave us nourishment and did not prescribe vice. These things were given for common use. Therefore, you were not to claim anything as your own personal property. For you did the earth give generously of her fruits. For you did the waters generate the *scari* and the *acipenser*es and all their produce.<sup>3</sup> Not satisfied with these, you have tasted food that is forbidden to you. Everything is heaped up before your envious eyes, so that the perversity of your greed may become all the more grievous.

(3) But we are unable to record the multiplicity of the names of all those species which by divine command were brought to life in a moment of time. At the same instant

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<sup>2</sup> Gen. 1.20.

<sup>3</sup> A species of fish regarded as a delicacy by the Romans.

substantial form and the principle of life were brought into existence; associated was a sort of vital vigor and power. The earth was replete with plants. The sea was filled with living things. In the one, vegetative life blossomed forth; in the other, animal life prevailed. In the earth, too, water claimed its part. The earth is laved by the fish of the sea. From it comes their prey. Gnats buzz and frogs croak even around the borders of the marshes that gave them birth. They, too, have heard the command of the Lord: 'Let the waters abound with life.'

(4) We know that the serpent species is given the name of 'creeper' from the fact that it creeps over the earth. With more assurance we can say that every creature that swims presents the natural appearance of a creature that creeps. For, when these animals sink into deep water, they seem to cleave through it. Yet, when they swim, they seem to creep with their whole body as they propel it over the surface of the water. Hence David has also said: 'This great sea which stretcheth wide its arms; there are creeping things without number.'<sup>4</sup> There are a great many such animals provided with feet for walking. They are amphibians, living either in the water or on land; for example, seals, crocodiles and water-horses. The latter are called hippopotamuses from the fact that they are generated in a river, in this case, the Nile. These animals do not walk, however, when they are in deep water. Rather, by using their feet they are able by swimming to propel themselves forward; not, however, as one would perform the act of walking. The animal makes progress as one would with the use of an oar, just as a boat glides along with the help of oars and 'ploughs the waters with its keel.'<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ps. 103.25.

<sup>5</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* 5.142.

*Chapter 2*

(5) 'Let the waters abound with life,' said the Lord—a brief statement, but a significant one and one that is widely effective in endowing with their nature the smallest and the largest animals without distinction. The whale, as well as the frog, came into existence at the same time by the same creative power. Without effort does God produce the greatest things. He is not averse to creating the least.<sup>1</sup> Nature is not in pain when she gives birth to dolphins, just as she is not in pain when she produces tiny animals like snails and purple-fish.

Take note of the fact that there are far more animals in the sea than on land. Count, if you can, all the species of fish from the smallest to the greatest, for example, the cuttle-fish, the polypus, the oyster, the sea and river crab, and even the different types among these. What shall I say of the different species of serpent, of the dragon, the murena, and the eel?—not to mention the scorpions, the frogs, the tortoise, the mustela, also, and the sea-dog, the sea-calf, the monstrous shark,<sup>2</sup> the dolphin, the seal, and the sea-lion. What need is there to add to our list the sea-ousel, the sea-thrush, and the sea-peacock, whose colors we see in the feathers of birds as, for example, the black ousel and the peacock with its varied colored back and neck; also in the feathers of the thrush with its spotted breast and in the feathers of the rest of the birds whose names and species belong to this earth of ours? These, as a matter of fact, came into existence in the seas and in the multitudinous rivers, since the waters at the divine command were the first to produce 'creeping creatures having life.'

(6) Add to this the beneficence of God whereby what we

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3.86,93.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 5.822.

cherish in the water is an object of fear on land. This is true, because what is harmful on land is in water without harm—even the water-snakes are bereft of poison. The lion is a terrifying animal on land; he is gentle in the water. The murena, which is said to be somewhat harmful, is a choice table food. The frog is repellent when in the marshes, is pleasing when in water, and excels all in its deliciousness as food. If you desire to know more on this subject, make enquiry of fishermen in different localities, for no one person can possibly know all there is to know.

Be on your guard, of course, against dogs; even those in the sea. These the Apostle instructs us to beware of and to avoid even in the Church: 'Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil-workers.'<sup>3</sup> The mustela (marten), which on land is malodorous, is sweet-smelling in the sea. As a land animal it is capable of defending itself by its odor; as a marine animal, it affords no less pleasure when caught than when it is free.

I shall not refrain from addressing by name the thymallus,<sup>4</sup> endowed with the name of a flower. Wherever you are found, whether in the waters of the Ticino or of the beautiful Adige, a flower you are. A more forceful testimony to the fact that you give forth a sweet odor lies in the facetious remark: You smell like a fish or a flower. According to usage, therefore, the odor of the fish is identical with that of the flower. What is more pleasing than your appearance, more delightful than your sweetness, and more fragrant than your odor? You emit from your body an odor which may well be compared to that of honey.<sup>5</sup>

What shall I say of the tender qualities of the ravens and wolves of the sea? These wolves do not inspire fear in lambs. Such is the charm of water that its sea-lions flee from the

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<sup>3</sup> Phil. 3.2.

<sup>4</sup> Probably a species of salmon.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 4.169.



sea-calves, as follows from the prophetic utterance on the sanctity of the Church: 'Then the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion and the ox shall eat straw.'<sup>6</sup> This is not to be wondered at, since even in the Church the effect of water [of baptism] is such that the guilt of the wicked, once it is washed away, has become assimilated to innocence.

Why should I make mention here, also, of the purple of kings which adorn their banquet halls and give color to their garments? What is venerated in kings is a gift of water;<sup>7</sup> of water, too, is the brilliance of their array. Add to this fact that the sea-pig was esteemed by the Jews, because there is nothing impure which water does not make clean. For this reason, that which is not in the same status as the land animal they cannot consider to be impure.

### Chapter 3

(7) Innumerable are the ways, innumerable, too, are the species of fish. Various kinds<sup>1</sup> of larger fish, such as trout, produce eggs. They entrust these seeds to the fostering care of the waters. The water, therefore, like a fond mother of living things, gives them breath and life and carries out the function, as if it were a perpetual one, provided by the first primal law. Others, such as the female of the mustela, produce from their bodies living offspring. This is true of the sea-dogs and the monstrous whales, the dolphins, seals, and others of that species. If, perchance, when they have brought forth their offspring, they have a presentiment of some situation of extreme danger, in order to protect their youthful progeny and to allay their panic, they have recourse to

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<sup>6</sup> Isa. 65.25.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.637-642.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Isidore, *Etymol.* 12.6.6; A. C. Andrews, *TAPA* 86 (1955) 314 n. 43.

the following manifestation of maternal affection. Opening their mouths, they cause their offspring to attach themselves to their teeth, which in this case cause no harm. It is related, also, that they receive and hide their offspring within their bodies, even within the womb that bore them.

What human emotion can compare with this devotion on the part of fish for their progeny? We are satisfied to offer a kiss. It is not sufficient for them to open their wombs to receive their young. They invite them back without inflicting harm and reanimate them by the fostering heat of their bodies. They restore them by their breath, so that they live as two in one body. This they do until conditions are safe for their young or while by the interposition of their bodies they are able to defend their own brood from the perils which lie in wait for them. Who on beholding this devotion would not, even though he were able to attain it, consider himself to be their inferior by far? Who would not in his wonder be astonished that nature should retain among fishes that quality which men have lost? Many men have slain their long-wanted sons because of suspicion and hate of a step-mother. Others, as we read,<sup>2</sup> have eaten the flesh of their own children. A mother became the tomb of her own dear ones, whereas the womb of the parent fish serves as a sort of rampart to protect the innocent fosterlings sheltered within her womb.<sup>3</sup>

(8) Different species of fish, therefore, follow diverse customs. Some produce eggs; others give birth to offspring alive and already formed. Those which produce eggs do not, as birds do, build a nest. They do not undergo the fatigue resulting from an extended period of brooding; they do not at great discomfort to themselves give nourishment to their young. The egg falls and is received in the womb of mother

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Deut. 28.53; 4 Kings 6.28.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Cicero, *De officiis* 1.97.

nature, who welcomes it as a fond nurse would, quickly forming it into a living being by the exercise of fostering care. No sooner is the egg given life by the touch of the parent that it falls and fish issues forth.

(9) And then what pure and untarnished generations follow without intermingling one after another, so that a thymallus produces a thymallus; a sea-wolf, a sea-wolf. The sea-scorpion, too, preserves unstained its marriage bed. Thus it shares in the chastity of its species, but not in its poisonous qualities, for the sea-scorpion does not sting. On the contrary, it has curative qualities.

Fish, therefore, know nothing of union with alien species. They do not have unnatural betrothals such as are designedly brought about between animals of two different species as, for instance, the donkey and the mare, or again the female donkey and the horse, both being examples of unnatural union. Certainly there are cases in which nature suffers more in the nature of defilment rather than that of injury to the individual. Man as an abettor of hybrid barrenness is responsible for this. He considers a mongrel animal more valuable than one of a genuine species. You mix together alien species and you mingle diverse seeds. You go to the extent of frequently forcing animals to a forbidden copulation—all this in the name of 'efficiency.' And because you cannot cause in man a lack of fecundity by a mingling of species, you take from man that with which he was born—you take what is virile from man and deny him the use of his sexual organs. In this way you make a man a eunuch, so effecting by your audacity what is denied to man by nature.

(10) How good a mother water can be we can learn from the considerations that I here propose. Man has taught that parents should repudiate their sons; he has taught separations, hates, and injuries. For your benefit learn of the close ties between parents and children.

Fish cannot live without water. They cannot endure separation from the association with their parents and from the nourishment provided for them. Nature has so ordained it that they die immediately when they are separated from their element. They do not live, as other animals do, by breathing this air of ours. Nature has not furnished them with the means of respiration; otherwise, they would not be able to keep living under water without breathing in air. Our air corresponds to their water. Just as air provides for us the means of living, water for them serves a similar function. Life leaves us the instant our organs for breathing are cut off, because we cannot even for a brief moment be deprived of the breath of life. When deprived of their sustenance in water, fish, too, cease to live.

(11) The reasons for this are clear. We have lungs which receive the air as it enters through the larger passages of the thorax. Being permeated with numerous pores, the lungs are able by the infusion of air to cool the internal heat. When the thorax receives nutriment, it separates what is superfluous from the health-giving juices and the blood; so, too, the lung is accessible in order that the intake of air may all the more readily reach it. Fish are furnished with gills which sometimes fold up and close, at other times expand and open up. In the process of closing and opening, the function of respiration is carried out as water is received and transmitted within.

Fish, therefore, have their own peculiar nature, which is not shared with other animals. They have distinctive habits and find their material for sustaining life in a very special and alien substance. Wherefore they do not receive nourishment from man and do not find, as land animals do, any pleasure and delight from the touch of man's hand, not even if they are kept alive in private fish-ponds.

*Chapter 5*

(12) What shall I say about the closely packed arrangement of the teeth of fish? They do not have what sheep and oxen possess, partial denture on one side of their gums. Rather, they are armed with teeth on both sides, because, if they delay in the act of swallowing their food in water, their prey could easily be washed and carried away by the water's action. For that reason their teeth are closely-packed and sharp so as to be able to bite and dispatch quickly their food and swallow it easily without delay. Hence, they do not chew the cud, as the scarus is said to do, if we are to believe those who either by chance or design have come to know such matters.

(13) To be sure, not even these have been able to escape experiencing acts of violence imposed on them by their fellows. The weaker everywhere are subject to the greed of the more powerful. The weaker one is, the more is he an object of prey. Many, it is true, feed on herbs and tiny worms, but there are those, also, who devour each other and feed on their own flesh. The lesser among them is the food of the greater and the greater in his turn is attacked by one stronger than he. The one who uses another as his prey becomes the food of still another. So it comes to pass that he who has devoured one fish is devoured in turn by another. They both meet in the same belly: the devourer and the devoured. The result is that together in the same entrails there is fellowship of victor and avenger.<sup>1</sup>

In their case, perhaps, this violent way of living has grown from inner compulsion, whereas with us it springs from avarice, not from nature. Again, fish are given to man for

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<sup>1</sup> For the vogue of this subject, see W. Parsons, *Traditio* 3 (1945) 382.



his use. They also constitute for us a pattern of the vices to be observed in our society. They serve, too, as an example to be avoided, lest the attack of the stronger on the weaker may present an occasion for the former to be exposed in turn to the violence of one who is still more powerful than he. In this way the person who does injury to another prepares for himself a snare for his own ultimate destruction.

(14) Those of you who attack another with deadly intent and those of you who drown the weak and pursue your victim even into the depths follow the example of this sort of fish. Be on your guard, while you are in pursuit of him, against an attack of a still stronger foe. The person who escapes your trap may well lead you into another. While he is in dread of the calamity in store for himself, your misfortune may first come before his eyes.

What is the difference between a rich man driven by his wicked lusts to absorb the patrimony of the weak and the fish called *silurus* whose belly is filled with the blood and flesh of smaller fish? 'The rich man died'<sup>2</sup> and his spoils were of no use to him. Why, even the infamy of his deeds of depredation have made his name a by-word. The *silurus* is taken and the futility of his predatory acts is revealed. How many are the fish found here who have themselves devoured others! And you, rich man, have in your conscience the fate of one who preyed on another, who had himself come into possession of a poor man's patrimony. In ruining him you added two patrimonies to your possessions, yet you are not satisfied. You say that you are taking vengeance on others when you are performing the same deed for which you are seeking vengeance. Thus, you are more unjust than the unjust, more iniquitous than the iniquitous, more avar-

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2 Luke 16.22.



icious than the avaricious! See that you do not come to the same end as the fish. Beware of the hook and the net!

But you do not anticipate any resistance to your power. The silurus did not foresee that someone would throw out a fish-hook or stretch out a net. He believed that, if he were caught in the net, he would be able to break through it. Still he did not escape the fisherman's trident. He became emeshed in bonds that were too strong to permit him to escape. Without a doubt, the more serious the iniquities which he commits, the more difficult is it for a person to escape his crimes, until one day he is forced to pay for his evil deeds the debt which is certainly difficult for him to avoid.

### *Chapter 6*

(15) We are justified, therefore, in comparing man to a fish. Listen to the reason for that statement: 'And the kingdom of heaven is like to a net cast into the sea that gathered in fish of every kind. When it was filled, they hauled it out and sitting down on the beach, they gathered the good fish into vessels, but threw away the bad. So will it be at the end of the world. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from among the just and will cast them into the furnace of fire.'<sup>1</sup>

Fish, then, are either good or bad. The good are preserved for their reward; the bad are straightway burned. The good fish is not ensnared by the net, but is lifted up. He is not slain or killed by the hook, but is suffused with the blood of a precious wound. In his mouth is found the

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 13.47-50.

good price by which the apostolic tribute and the tax due to Christ may be paid.<sup>2</sup> For thus is it written in the words of the Lord: 'From whom do the kings of the earth receive tribute or customs; from their own sons or from others? And Peter replied: "from others." The Lord said: "Go to the sea and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up. And opening its mouth thou wilt find a stater; take that and give it to them for me and for thee."'<sup>3</sup>

(16) Do not, then, hold in fear, my good fish, the hook of Peter. It does not kill. Rather, it consecrates. Do not underestimate yourself because your body is weak. You have in your mouth something which may serve as an offering for Peter and for Christ. Do not hold in fear the nets of Peter, to whom Jesus speaks:<sup>4</sup> 'Put out into the deep and lower your nets for a catch.' He does not throw out his net on the left, but on the right side as was commanded by Christ. Do not have fear for his catch, because it was to him that was said: 'Henceforth thou shalt catch men alive.' He threw out his net, therefore, and caught Stephen, who in the Gospel was the first to arise having in his mouth a stater of justice. Whence he called out with sure confession of faith: 'Behold I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'<sup>5</sup> The Lord Jesus is a true representative of this fish, for He knew that in the mouth of the fish there was the tribute of His tax. Stephen, a generous witness of his faith, fulfilled the judgment and the teaching of Peter on him as well as the grace of Christ by a glorious martyrdom.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Matt. 17.26.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 17.24-26.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 5.4.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 7.55.

*Chapter 7*

(17) Do not be troubled by the fact that I have compared the Gospel to a sea. The sea is the Gospel on which Christ walked. It is the Gospel on which Peter, with the support of Christ's right hand, discovered a defense for his faith and the grace of stability, although he swerved from the way by denying Him. And it is precisely from the Gospel that Stephen arose. The Gospel is the sea in which the Apostles fish, into which is cast the net which is like the kingdom of heaven.<sup>1</sup> The Gospel is the sea in which the mysteries of Christ are revealed. The Gospel is the sea by which the Hebrew made his escape and the Egyptian was overwhelmed and slain.<sup>2</sup> The Gospel is the sea, because the Church is the bride of Christ and is also the plenitude of divine grace, which is poured over the seas, as the Prophet said: 'He hath founded it upon the seas.'<sup>3</sup> Man should immerse himself in the waters, because he is in truth a fish. Let not the floods of this world overwhelm you. If there is a storm, make for the high seas and the depths. If the weather is calm, play in the waves. If a tempest should come, beware lest the seething waters drive you on the rocky shore, for it is written: 'Be therefore wise as serpents.'<sup>4</sup>

(18) Since the example of the cunning serpent has been offered, let us be cunning, also, in regard to entrance into the state of matrimony and to remaining therein. Let us love this mutual association which has become our lot. If those who have at the time of their births lived in entirely

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<sup>1</sup> Matt. 13.47.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Exod. 14.21-24.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 23.2.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 10.16.

different regions yet agree to live together, if it happens that the husband should undertake a trip to a foreign land, no distance or abstinence should diminish the cherished love of the pair. The same law binds the present and the absent; the same bond of nature cements together the rights of conjugal love between the absent as well as between the present. The necks of both parties are linked together in the same beneficent yoke, even if one of them should find himself in regions entirely remote, because both parties share in the yoke of grace which is one of the spirit, not of the body.

When the viper, the deadliest kind of animal and the most cunning of the whole species of serpents, evinces a desire for copulation, he searches for a sea-murena already known to him or he seeks for a new mate. Proceeding toward the shore, he makes his presence known by a hissing sound, whereby he invites conjugal embrace. The sea-murena does not repulse the appeal and yields to the poisonous serpent the desired enjoyment of their conjugal bond.

What is the purpose of such a discussion as this, if it does not mean that we should put up with our married partner and, if he is away from home, that we should await his return to his family? Although he may be cruel, deceitful, uncouth, wayward, and drunken, can this be more intolerable than the poison which is no obstacle to the sea-murena in dealing with her mate? When invited, she does not fail to respond and embraces the slimy serpent with great affection. The male endures your defects and your feminine levities. Can you not bear with your husband? Adam was deceived by Eve, not Eve by Adam.<sup>5</sup> It is right that he whom the woman enticed to do wrong should assume the office of

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. 1 Tim. 2.14.

guide, lest he fall once more because of feminine instability.

But he is repugnant and uncouth! Yes, but he pleased you at one time. Do you think that a husband should be chosen more than once? The ox and the horse look for and cherish their mates, and, if a substitution takes place, they are unable to carry the yoke together. They feel that they do not form an integral part of the team. You repudiate your yoke-mate and think that a frequent change should be made. If one day he fails you, you bring in a rival and straightway without knowing why, yet knowingly, you do violence to your sense of modesty.

The viper searches for his absent mate, calls to her with a hiss of invitation. When he feels his mate approaching, he spits forth the poison with due regard for his consort and the nuptial rite. Why do you repel your husband coming back from a far country? The viper gazes upon the sea in an endeavor to find his consort. You put obstacles in the path of your husband. You stir up the poison of litigation. You reject him and in the conjugal embrace emit dread poison, scorning your husband and putting to shame your nuptial bond.

(19) As for the man—for we can apply this example to him, also: lay aside the inordinate emotions of your heart and the rudeness of your manners when you meet your patient wife. Get rid of your obstinacy when your gentle consort offers you her love. You are not a master, but a husband. You have not acquired perchance a handmaid, but a wife. God designed you to be a guide to the weaker sex, not a dictator. Be a sharer in her activities. Be a sharer in her love. The viper pours forth his poison; can you not get rid of your hardness of heart? Although you have by nature a severity of character, you ought to temper it in consideration of your

married state and control your tendency to rudeness by holding in respect your conjugal relationship.

There are occasions for sin. Do not seek the bed that belongs to another. Do not by guile enter into another union. Adultery is a grievous offense. It does violence to nature. At the beginning God formed two creatures, Adam and Eve; that is, man and wife. He formed woman from the man; this is, from the rib of Adam. He bade them both to live in one body and in one spirit. Why, then, do you cleave one body apart? Why do you divide one spirit? That is an adulterous offense against nature. It is a lesson which is taught us by the willing union of sea-murena and viper, a union not grounded on similarity of species, but on ardent desire. Give ear, men! He who desires association with such a serpent may be likened to one who seeks occasion to have adulterous relations with another man's wife. It can be said that he has the very traits of a serpent. He hastens to the viper who embraces him in the devious ways of lubricity, not in the righteous ways of love. He hastens to one who takes up again his poison like the viper and who is said to consume again the poison, once the act of copulation has been completed. The adulterer is like a viper. Hence Solomon says that when a man is intoxicated his passions are aroused. His body is swollen as if bitten by a snake and his poison is spread abroad like a basilisk's. That you may realize that he has spoken of an adulterer, he added these words: 'Thy eyes shall behold strange women and thy mouth shall utter perverse things.'<sup>6</sup>

(20) Do not form the opinion that we have based our argument on contradictions, in that we have made use of the example of a viper in order to point both a good and a

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6 Prov. 22.33.



bad moral. It serves the purposes of instruction to bring forward a two-fold consideration. On the one hand, we are like the serpent in being ashamed to be loyal to our beloved. Again, by severing the bonds of holy matrimony we prefer the harmful and the lubricous, as in the case of union with a serpent, to what is really and truly salutary.

### *Chapter 8*

(21) As we have entered upon a discussion on the trait of craftiness, whereby a man strives to circumvent and deceive his brother and to contrive new ways of deception, thus trapping by guile and trickery a person whom he cannot overcome by force, it is not my intention to overlook the well-known deceitful character of the polypus. This animal, coming upon a rock on a shallow coast, fixes itself firmly on it. At the same time, it assumes by subtle art the color of the rock and conceals its back in a similar fashion. In this manner a great number of fish, unsuspecting any fraud and innocently believing that what they see is a rock, are taken into this artfully contrived trap to be waylaid by the tentacles of the polypus.

The prey thus makes its approach without external compulsion. It is captured by such methods as one would expect of those who often change their nature and stir up diverse means of ill,<sup>1</sup> so as to tempt the minds and hearts of all severally. Some boast of their continence when in converse with the continent. Associating with the intemperate, they show themselves to be devoid of chastity and to wallow in the troughs of intemperance. Those who see or hear them yield easily to their influence and for that reason soon fall into temptation, being unable to turn aside or avoid what

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1 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.338 (*Allecto*).

is likely to injure them. Weakness, when cloaked in the veil of benignity, can inflict harm of a more serious nature. And so we should be aware of those who extend the tentacles of their deceit far and wide or those who assume various shapes. These people are like the polypus that has manifold entanglements and many astute ways by which it can ensnare whatever falls into the rocky shores wherein we are beguiled.

(22) What tricks are displayed by the crab in its eager search for food! The oyster is a special objective in its quest for a delicious banquet. But its eagerness for food is tempered by its sense of the possibility of being involved in danger, for the chase is as difficult as it is perilous. Its difficulty lies in the fact that the flesh of its victim is enclosed in a shell of more than usual solidity. Just as in compliance with divine power the delicacy of the flesh of its prey has been stoutly defended by nature which nourishes and fosters it in the form of an encircling rampart, so all in vain are the crab's attacks, because the closed oyster cannot be opened by any display of force. There is the danger, too, that the oyster may hook it in its claws. Therefore, the crab resorts to artifice and contrives new ways of waylaying its prey.

Accordingly, since every living being is attracted by sentiments of pleasure, the crab looks for an occasion when the oyster, finding a place protected from the wind and within range of the sun's rays, opens wide its double doors and unbars the bolts of its shell in order to enjoy to the full the open air. At that moment the crab, by stealthily injecting a pebble within the shell of the oyster, prevents it from being closed. Having acquired an entrance in this manner, the crab inserts its claws without danger to itself and devours the flesh within the shell.

(23) There are men who, like the crab, exercise surreptitiously their guile on others and fortify their own weaknesses

by the use of certain inherent characteristics. Thus they weave a web of deceit around their brethren and find their sustenance in another's anxieties.

Be content with what is your own and do not let your well-being be based on doing harm to your neighbor. You may find your livelihood in the simplicity of innocence. The man in possession of his own good knows nothing of way-laying others. He is not inflamed by the desires of the avaricious man, whose every gain is at the expense of virtue and a further incentive to cupidity. Therefore, 'should he come to know his blessings,'<sup>2</sup> the poor man is truly happy who lives righteously in a manner which is to be preferred to all the treasures of the world, because 'better a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasures without fear.' How much under these circumstance does man need to support life? If you go beyond that little and seek that, also, which others find pleasure in possessing, that, too, has little to commend it: 'It is better to be invited to herbs with love than to a fatted calf with hatred.'<sup>3</sup>

Let us use our talents, therefore, for the acquisition of grace and the attainment of salvation, not for the circumvention of others who harm us not. We may well make use of examples taken from the sea, not for the purpose of exposing others to danger, but to make ourselves more perfect in the way of salvation.

### *Chapter 9*

(2) The urchin, a tiny, common and despicable animal—I refer to the sea variety—is frequently used by navigators as a sign of a threatening storm or as a harbinger of clear

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<sup>2</sup> Virgil, *Georgics* 2.458.

<sup>3</sup> Prov. 15.16,17.

weather. The reason for this lies in the fact that at the approach of a wind storm this little creature takes hold of a fairly large pebble and uses it as a sort of ballast or anchor so as to avoid being carried out of the water.<sup>1</sup> Thus it balances and directs itself by means of an alien weight, not by its innate strength. This sign gives an indication to the sailor that a storm is brewing. Accordingly, he takes precautions lest the sudden approach of a hurricane may find him unprepared.

What follower of the occult sciences, astrologer, or Chaldean can reveal in a comparable way the course of the stars, the movement of the heavens, and of the zodiacal signs? By what natural instinct has the tiny creature acquired this art? What teacher has instructed it? Who served as its interpreter of augural lore? Men behold the turmoil in the air and are often deceived, because at times the winds rush in without bringing on a tempest. The sea-urchin is not beguiled. Never at any time do its special signs fail to bring results.

(25) Whence did this tiny creature acquire such sure knowledge of the future? As there is nothing in the animal itself which can make possible such foreknowledge, be assured that it, too, has obtained the gift of prescience through the loving-kindness of the Lord of all things.

For, if God so clothes the grass of the field that we are struck with admiration; if He feeds the birds of the air;<sup>2</sup> 'if he provides food for the raven, when her young ones cry to God';<sup>3</sup> if He has given to women skill in the art of weaving; if the spider, who so artfully and delicately 'hangs on the doorway her loose-woven nets,'<sup>4</sup> is not left bereft of

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1 Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 4.194-196. (bees).

2 Cf. Matt. 6.26,30.

3 Job 38.41.

4 Virgil, *Georgics* 4.247.

wisdom; if He has given strength to the horse and sends forth terror from his mane, so that he exults in the field and laughs in the face of kings as he smells the battle afar off and is aroused by the sound of the trumpet<sup>5</sup>—if He has filled with the largesse of His wisdom these manifold irrational creatures as well as the grass and lilies of the field,<sup>6</sup> who can doubt but that He has distributed this gift of foreknowledge also to the sea-urchin?

He has left nothing unexplored, nothing unrevealed. He sees all who nourishes all. He fills all things with wisdom who, as it is written, 'has made all things in wisdom.'<sup>7</sup> And so, if He has not neglected the sea-urchin as beyond the range of His visitation; if He has care of it and moulds it so as to enable it to see signs of what is to come—if that is true, has He no care of you and yours? Surely He has, as He testifies in the words of His own holy Scripture: 'Look at the birds of the air'; if He feeds them, 'are not you of much more value than they?'<sup>8</sup> For, if God so clothes 'the grass of the field which flourishes today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more you, O you of little faith?'<sup>9</sup>

### *Chapter 10*

(26) Are we to suppose that fish without a special gift of nature possess also that instinct whereby each species has allotted to it a definite space which no one species may leave and into which no other species may enter? What geometer has plotted the bounds of these habitations, never at any time to be broken? We have heard of one who has

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Job 39.19-25.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Matt. 6.28.

<sup>7</sup> Ps. 103.24.

<sup>8</sup> Matt. 6.26; Luke 12.28.

<sup>9</sup> Matt. 6.30.

measured land, never of one who has applied measurements to the sea. Yet fish know their own confines, which are not bounded by city walls, by gates, or by buildings; neither are they marked as in the boundaries of fields. But each has a terminal limit of space in accordance with its need, so that only so much is given to each as to satisfy completely its wants—not so much as its unregulated greed can claim for itself.

There is, if I may say so, a law of nature that one should seek only what suffices for nourishment and that the allotment 'which thy fathers have set'<sup>1</sup> should be in proportion to the need for food. One species of fish breeds and flourishes in one arm of the sea; another species, in another. Hence, you will not find different species of fish mixed together. What in one place is abundant is, contrariwise, lacking elsewhere. This bay is the haunt of the *cephali*. In another bay we find the sea-wolves. In still another live certain species of crustaceans. Each is not free to wander as it pleases, yet the passage is not impeded by intervening mountain ranges nor by river channels. Rather, by force of habit each one is by nature constrained to keep itself within the bounds of its native habitat and to consider suspect a fish that leaves the regions of its fellows.

(27) But for us, men, there are far different sentiments. We desire change for various reasons: a wish for travel, for release from daily associations. We long for the approval of strangers and to remove the age-long boundaries which our ancestors have set up, adding estate to estate, household to household.

The earth alone does not suffice. We use the sea itself for our foundations. On the other hand, in compliance with individual whims, the land is excavated and sea water is brought in so as to form islands or straits for men's use.<sup>2</sup> Men

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<sup>1</sup> Prov. 22.31.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Horace, *Odes* 2.18.17-26.



claim the sea for themselves by right of ownership and boast that they have subjected fishes like slaves to a condition of servitude. This, they say, is my bay; that one belongs to another. Like sovereigns, they divide the elements among themselves. For some people, oysters are bred in water. For others, fish are enclosed in a fish pond.

The sea does not suffice for their luxuriant living. They must have reserve stores of oysters. They keep a reckoning of the age of each oyster bed. Receptacles are built for the fish in case the rich man's table may not be replenished from the sea. How they are all ears when the word 'neighbor' is mentioned! How eagerly will they gaze on his possessions! What plans enter their minds day and night to take something away from their neighbors! 'Shall they alone dwell in the midst of the earth?' exclaims the Prophet.<sup>3</sup> The Lord is aware of this and waits to punish them.

(28) How alien to the fish is this monstrous greed! Men seek after what is remote in the realm of nature. They are familiar with the seas beyond the bounds of the known world. There no islands intervene, nor are there bodies of land either in that region or situated beyond that point. For that reason, in that place where the wide extent of water precludes every desire to gaze upon it and every sentiment of boldness to sail thereon for the sake of gain, there the whale is said to have his lair. There, too, live a huge species of fish, reported to be mountainous in size by those who have ventured to approach and see them. This huge fish lives tranquilly there, remote from islands and uncontaminated by the nearness of port towns. They have their separate habitats and locations all their own. They are unaffected by the presence of neighboring boundaries and do not desire frequent change of place and to flit aimlessly to

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<sup>3</sup> Isa. 5.8.

and fro.<sup>4</sup> Rather, they cherish their habitat as their native land and consider it a delight to dwell therein.<sup>5</sup> They have selected these regions in order to pass their lives in solitary fashion, remote from interference and from contact with other creatures.

(29) There is another species of fish which changes its location, not because of natural instability, but from the necessity of spawning. They formulate a plan and design to reach a certain place at a time of the year which is right and opportune. Gathering together, as if with joint purpose, from many places and from diverse inlets of the sea, they go out in search of the north wind, swimming in massed array. Impelled, as it were, by a law of nature, they hasten to their familiar haunts in the northern regions. If you were to behold this huge school of fish on the move, you would have the impression of encountering an ocean current—such is the force of their onward rush through the waters, such is their mad desire to reach the Black Sea through the straits of Propontis.

Who announces these places, who prescribes these seasons for the fish? Who has arranged their itinerary for them, their plan for mass movement, their destination, and the time of their return? Men, of course, have their commanders whose orders are waited, whose watchwords are agreed upon, whose edicts are made known to the people of the provinces for the purposes of assembly, and whose dispatches are sent to the military tribunes, fixing the day— notwithstanding all these preparations, many people find it impossible to come on the appointed days. What commanding officer has given the order? What teacher has given this instruction, what surveyor has plotted the journey, what guide has led the way, so that no obstacle is encountered?

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Lucretius 3.1057,1058.

<sup>5</sup> Eccle. 3.2.

But I am aware of the identity of the Commander, who by reason of divine dispensation infuses His orders in the senses of all created things, who, without the use of words, allows mute animals to follow the directions of natural instinct. His instruction reaches even to the smallest creatures; it is not limited to the largest. Fishes follow a divine law, whereas men contravene it. Fishes duly comply with the celestial mandates, but men make void the precepts of God. Because a fish is mute and deprived of reason, is it, therefore, an object of contempt in your eyes? See to it that you do not begin to be more contemptible to yourself, if you prove yourself to be more irrational than the irrational creatures.

What is more rational than this migration of fish, a procedure which becomes less intelligible as we recount it than it is when we look at the facts themselves. They advance in summer time to the straits of the Black Sea because the water in this region is sweeter than in others. The sun does not linger in those waters as long as it does elsewhere. There is not, therefore, a loss of sweet and drinkable water. Who is not aware of the fact that marine animals often find delight in fresh water? Hence it happens that different species of fish are frequently caught while they are on the way to spawn in the upper reaches of a river.

This, therefore, may be the reason why they manifest preference for the Black Sea. It may well be, too, that the prevailing north wind tempers the summer heat there. Again, they select that region as a more suitable one for the task of bringing up their offspring. Their young, in fact, can hardly endure exposure to the vicissitudes of a different climate. The gentle clemency of the climate in that locality fosters their growth. Accordingly, when their objective is achieved, all return together to the point from which they departed.

(30) Let us reflect on the reason for this. The Black Sea

forms a body of water which is exposed to the north wind and to other winds of the most violent nature. Hence, when a severe storm rages and tempests are brewing in that region, sand is churned up from the deep, as the turbidness of the water there gives proof. This condition is intensified by the force of the wind. The water becomes more dense and presents, we can be sure, an intolerable situation not only for sailors, but even for animal life in the sea. An additional reason is offered by the condition of the Black Sea itself. Into it flow numerous and mighty rivers. Hence, this body of water is very cold in the winter season and freezes over, augmented by the continual inflow. Wherefore the fish, acting like supreme lords of the waters, seek to take advantage of the cooler air there in the summer season. When they have enjoyed this pleasant temperature, they hasten back once more in order to avoid the wintry blasts. So they flee from the bitter weather of the northern regions and take themselves into other bodies of water where the winds are kindlier and calmer or where a more temperate sun can bring spring-like weather.

The fish knows 'the time to be born.'<sup>6</sup> Solomon in his wisdom declared this to be a great mystery, this knowledge of the time to go and the time to return, the time for performance and the time for change. Fish are not deceived in this knowledge, because they follow an instinct of nature, the true teacher of loyal devotion, and not the deliberations of reason and rhetorical argumentation. Hence, all living creatures have a prescribed time for bringing forth offspring. By man alone are such times undetermined and ill-planned. The other creatures seek out a season of clement weather. It falls to women alone to give birth in seasons of inclemency. An unsettled and arbitrary desire to produce offspring leads to an uncertain time for childbirth.

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<sup>6</sup> Eccle. 3.2.

Fish cross over so many seas in order to bestow some benefit on their species. We, too, cross over manifold seas. But how much more commendable is a voyage which is undertaken, not for the sake of material profit, but for the love of one's offspring! Loyal devotion is the propelling motive in their case. In our case the motive is commercial gain. They bring back with them their own progeny, more precious to them than any kind of merchandise. Urged by a dire lust for gain, we bring back a cargo that is far from atoning for the dangers involved. They make an effort to reach their home, while we abandon it. They, as a result of their migration, acquire an addition to their species. We, on the other hand, in the course of navigation are subject to a decrease.

(31) When we behold this preparation made with such keenness of instinct for a ritualistic migration to the north for the production of a numerous progeny, and again when we note that other marine animals possess such power in their tiny bodies that they are able to bring to a stop mighty ships sailing along under full sail, who would then deny that such an instinct and capacity have been infused in them by a divine power? We have reference here to a little fish called *echeneis*, which is said to slow up without effort a huge ship. The vessel seems to be adrift and, as it were, rooted in the sea, for at times this fish keeps the ship motionless. Do you suppose that this marine animal has such potential power without the aid of divine intervention?

What shall I say of the sword-fish, the saw-fish, the sea-dog, the whale, or the hammer-fish? What shall I say of the turtle which inflicts a sting even when dead? Just as a person who treads on the still palpitating head of a viper is said to suffer a more serious injury—in fact, an incurable wound<sup>7</sup>—than he would from poison, so, too, a turtle when

7 Cf. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.190; 10.189.



dead is reported to inflict a more dangerous wound from its sting than it does when alive. Again, the hare, which is a timid animal on land, is formidable as a sea animal and causes infection which spreads rapidly and is not easily cured. The Creator has so ordained it that not even at sea are you to be quite safe from lurking perils. Because of these few harmful creatures you should take your stand like a sentry on guard, armed always with the weapons of faith and the shield of devotion, awaiting the protection of your Lord.

### *Chapter 11*

(32) We wish, now, to return to the Atlantic Ocean. What whales are found there, of huge bulk and measureless size! If they were to float on the surface of the sea, you would imagine that they were islands or extremely high mountains whose peaks reach to the sky! These animals are said to appear, not on the coast or on shore, but in the depths of the Atlantic Ocean. To catch sight of them sailors are enticed to risk navigation within those regions. But these elemental mysteries are not likely to be faced without experiencing mortal terror!

(33) Now let us rise upward from the depths of the sea. Let our discourse emerge a little therefrom and take itself to higher regions. Let us take note of matters which are pleasing in themselves and which also have come under the observation of many people. We hear of water changing into masses of salt so solid that an axe is frequently required to cut it. In fact, we do not need to marvel at what is reported of salt in Britain. This takes on the appearance and the dazzling splendor of marble itself and, in addition, is a salutary aid to bodily needs of food and drink. Note, too, how the not unpleasing coral is only a sea plant which, when



exposed to the air, becomes solid as a stone. We see how nature has inserted in the oyster a highly valuable pearl, which by the action of sea water has become a solid particle within the oyster's soft flesh. Wealth which is hardly attainable by kings lies open to common gaze along our shores. It is found in, and gathered from, rugged rock and cliff.

Water also produces a 'golden fleece' and the sea coasts are the source of a wool which is similar in appearance to the metal just mentioned. Its color has not been duplicated up to now by those who apply to woolen goods different types of dye. For that reason human ingenuity is unable to compete with the natural products of the sea. We are aware of the care and attention given to the less costly sheep's wool. No matter how perfect it is, under no circumstances do we find wool that comes naturally dyed. Here is a color that is natural—a color never yet approached by the application of dyes. And to think that this [golden] fleece is a fish! Moreover, the shell-fish that yields the purple which distinguishes a king is itself a marine animal.

(34) What delightful scenes in meadow or garden can equal the prospect of a light blue sea? Your flowers may flash forth a golden hue, but the wool of the sea has its golden refulgence, too! Whereas the colors of the flowers quickly fade, the other retains its hue for many a day! From afar we note the lily's brilliance in the garden. From afar, too, we see the flashing sails of the ships. A breath of perfume follows one; a breeze, the other. What use does a leaf supply to equal the advantage of the commerce of ships at sea? Lilies give us sweet odors for the pleasure of our senses, whereas sailing ships bring sustenance for mankind.

Add to this the picture of the flying fish and the frolicking dolphin. Moreover, there is the additional delight in the roar of the resounding billows, in the sight of ships flitting to

shore or sailing out to sea. 'Even as when from the barriers the chariots stream forth'<sup>1</sup>—what an occasion for delight and enthusiasm on the part of the spectators! Yet, in contrast to the ships of commerce, the steed runs to no purpose. The latter, because devoid of cargo, runs in vain.<sup>2</sup> The other has its holds filled with sustenance for men.

What is more to be desired than what is speeded along, not by the impulse of a whip, but by a breeze, where there is nothing to hinder one's progress, where all is favorable, and where no one who reaches his goal is a loser.<sup>3</sup> All the boats which come to land are given a wreath. The palm is the prize for a successful voyage and victory is the reward for their homecoming. What a difference between the outgoing course and the return! One shows a cautious pace. The other is affected by the urge to make the goal. Add to this the sight of the shore with its line of boats awaiting a breeze from the skies as a signal for the start. Whereas the charioteer at the conclusion of his race is granted mere empty applause, the boatmen take part in giving thanks for their safe return.

(35) How shall I adequately speak of Jonas, whom the whale swallowed to grant him life and to return him to his activity as a prophet? The water restored to him the understanding which the earth had taken away. He who grieved when on land began to sing psalms in the belly of the whale. Again, the redemption of both elements is not lost sight of. The salvation of the earth had its forerunner in the sea, because the marvelous act of Jonas stands for that of the Son of Man. As Jesus lay 'in the heart of the earth,'<sup>4</sup> so was Jonas in the whale's belly. There is salvation in both elements. However, the sea furnishes a more significant example of

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1 Virgil, *Georgics* 1.512.

2 Cf. Ps. 32.17.

3 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 5.268,269.

4 Matt. 12.39.

piety, since a fish gave welcome to him whom men had repelled and has preserved, in the person of Jonas, Him whom men have crucified. Peter, too, weakened when on the sea,<sup>5</sup> but he did not fall. What he had admitted on the waters, however, he denied on land.<sup>6</sup> And so, in the former occasion he was accorded a hand-clap as to one who was loyal; in the latter case, because of his forgetfulness, he was met with a look of rebuke.<sup>7</sup>

But now let us request the Lord that our words, like those of Jonas, be cast on the land and not be suffered to float any longer on the sea. And it was well that the gourd-vine sprang up so as to shield us from misfortunes. But the earth, now parched by the advancing sun, warns us to seek rest, lest our minds begin to suffer from the earth's heat and our words, too, may fail us. Be assured that water has been given to us, more than it was to the Ninevites, as a source for the remission of sins.<sup>8</sup>

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5 Cf. Matt. 14.30.

6 Cf. Matt. 26.69-75.

7 Cf. Luke 22.61.

8 Cf. Jonas 4.6-11.

## THE EIGHTH HOMILY

### *Chapter 12*

*He remained silent for a little while and then resumed his discourse.*

(36) We have shied away, beloved brethren, from the necessity of dealing with birds, and our discussion on this subject might have taken wing along with the birds! It follows, somehow, as a natural consequence that those who hold some object in view or who desire to give expression to it in words are apt to take on the qualities of that which they behold or of that which they express orally. The result is that we linger, when exposed to what is more than usually inactive, and our observation takes on speed with the swift action of the object in view. This variability extends, also, to the area of literary style. Accordingly, at the moment when I am on my guard lest objects sunk deep in the sea may escape my observation—at such a moment the entire race of winged creatures has already escaped my ken. While I was bent over in diligent examination of the lowest depths of the sea, I paid no heed to the aerial flights of birds and

not even the shadow of 'nimble wings'<sup>2</sup> flashing in the waters has caused me to verge from my task.

In fact, when I arrived at the point where I believed that I had exhausted my subject, and when I felt that I had completed the fifth day, this reflection came into my mind: It is customary for the birds at nesting time 'to charm the sky with song,'<sup>3</sup> in joy that their allotted task is done. This usually happens, following, as it were, a ritual pattern, at dawn and at sunset, when the birds sing the praises of their Creator, at the moment of transition from day to night or from night to day. By such an omission I would have lost a mighty incentive for arousing our religious devotion. For what person of natural human sensibility would not blush to terminate the day without a ritual singing of the psalms, since even the tiniest bird ushers in the approach of day and night with customary devotion of sweet song?

(37) Let us return, therefore, to a discussion of the winged flock. We have almost lost sight of them as, like eagles they have taken flight, and hidden themselves amid the clouds. We realize that our pen should be recalled to the task when our eyes, laved in the waters, reached from the sea upwards to the sky and there beheld the birds 'borne through the empty air.'<sup>4</sup> You who are snarers of my words will act as judges as to whether they have flown off with better purpose or whether they have fallen into your nets to add to your good fortune.

I am not disturbed in my discussion on birds by any possibility of boredom in your part—a boredom which was not in evidence when I examined the depths. Otherwise, some of us would have nodded off during my sermon, only to be awakened by the song of birds. But I surely have no

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2 Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.15.

3 *Ibid.* 7.34.

4 Virgil, *Georgics* 3.109.

doubt that those who kept awake amid the mute company of fish will be unable to fall asleep when the birds sing, such is their charm to inspire wakefulness. A subject which might well have been passed over in our treatment of the third part of created living beings should not, in fact, be regarded as an indifferent one. The fact that there are three races of living creatures those of the earth, the air, and the water—is not open to doubt. Therefore it has been written: 'Let the waters bring forth reptiles, living creatures according to their kind, and winged creatures, flying over the earth along the firmament of heaven, each according to its kind.'<sup>5</sup>

(38) We are recalled to our previous theme like forgetful travelers who, because they have heedlessly passed their destination, are compelled to return. He, however, is a good traveler who makes up for the loss of time involved in retracing his steps by corresponding speed in the rest of his journey. I believe that I should act especially in this way now that I have come to the subject of birds, whose speedy flight often dazzles the eyes of men.<sup>6</sup> Why should one see fit to linger in those subjects in which swiftness generally brings pleasure? Let our discussion get on its pathless and unwonted way of literary composition. Let it resound and 'ring with the musical song of birds.'<sup>7</sup>

(39) But where shall I find the swan's song which gives us pleasure when sung in moments of grave danger, even to the point of imminent death? Where shall we find those strains of natural chant which emanate even from marshy regions—strains of most tuneful and delightful music? Where shall I find the voice of the parrot and the sweet song of the blackbird? Would that the nightingale were to give forth a song to arouse a sleeper from his slumber! That is the bird

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<sup>5</sup> Gen. 1.20-24.

<sup>6</sup> A Ciceronian expression; cf. *De senectute* 12.42.

<sup>7</sup> Virgil, *Georgics* 2.328.



accustomed to signal the rising of the sun at dawn and to spread abroad joy more penetrating than morning light. Still, if sweetness is lacking to their song, we have with us the moaning turtle-dove, the cooing pigeon,<sup>8</sup> and 'the raven who with deep tones calls down the rain.'<sup>9</sup> Wherefore let us illustrate as far as we can in our discourse the 'haunts of the birds'<sup>10</sup> in the countryside, relying on the knowledge which we have garnered from rustic folk.

### Chapter 13

(40) Now that we have discussed creeping creatures in the water, it is a highly difficult task to transfer our discourse at a moment's notice upwards to the birds in the sky. Let us, then, first speak of these birds which frequent the seas and the rivers. With their aid we can emerge. Accordingly, let us begin our discussion with the halcyon. This is a sea bird that is to be found bringing up her young on the shore, depositing her eggs in the sand about mid-winter. This is the time allotted for the hatching, when the sea is at its stormiest and the waves make their most destructive inroads on the shore. Wherefore the graciousness of this bird should appear all the more evident because of the periodic and unexpected recurrence of calm weather, because atmospheric conditions suddenly take on a milder tinge at the moment when the eggs are laid, when the sea is still stormy. The stormy blasts and violent winds subside while the halcyon broods over her eggs, 'when the sea was at peace and still.'<sup>1</sup> The eggs are hatched in seven days. At the end of that period the young

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Eclogues* 1.57,58.

<sup>9</sup> Virgil, *Georgics* 1.388.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 2.430.

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<sup>1</sup> Virgil, *Eclogues* 2.26.

brood leaves the protecting shell. At this point there is another period of seven days, during which the fledglings are nourished until they grow to maturity. Do not wonder at the fact that such a slight amount of time is needed for their growth, because very few days are necessary for the completion of the brooding stage. So much significance has been accorded by divine power to this tiny bird that sailors keep on the lookout for these fourteen days, which they call 'halycon days,' during which they expect calm weather and dread no more the tumult of the raging tempest.

(41) 'Are you not of more value than the sparrow?'<sup>2</sup> Thus the Lord spoke. If, therefore, at the sight of a tiny bird the sea rises suddenly and as suddenly subsides, and if in the midst of winter's cruel storms and tempests a tranquillity, permeating all the elements, 'sweeps the clouds from the sky,'<sup>3</sup> quickly calming the waves—if this is true, do you realize, you, a man-made to the image of God, how much hope you ought to have, if only in your eagerness for a pious life you would imitate that little bird's trusting confidence. The halcyon is not turned aside from her purpose at the sight of the approaching tempest and of the winds that rage at winter's onrush—rather, she is impelled all the more. Hence she lays her eggs on the shore where the sand, still wet from the retreating waves, welcomes them. She does not dread the rising waves, which she beholds as they break on the shore with threatening sound.

(42) And that you may not conclude that the halcyon shows slight regard for her eggs, she builds her nest without delay at the very place where she laid her eggs. She broods over her offspring and, while the waves pound the shore, shows no fear for her own safety. Rather, she entrusts herself to the winds and waves, secure in the beneficence of

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 12.7.

<sup>3</sup> Horace, *Odes* 1.7.15.

God. That is not all. Many more days still remain to complete the period of growth. During this time she has no fear that the tranquillity of the perfidious sea will be broken. She relies on her own merits, based now on the regular pattern of nature. She does not hide her brood in some secret corner of a house or in a cave. On the contrary, she entrusts them to the bare, cold ground. She does not protect them from the cold, but considers that they will be safer with the comfort of divine warmth, by means of which she may all other things disdain.

Who is there among us who does not cover his little ones with garments and who does not protect and shield them within the walls of his home? Who is there who does not close the windows on all sides to prevent even the slightest breeze to enter? And while we so anxiously attend to clothing and warmth, we are therefore depriving them of the protecting cover of celestial clemency, whereas the halcyon, by casting her brood out naked, has thereby clothed them with vesture that is divine.

(43) I shall not overlook the diving gulls. They have acquired that name from their frequent diving operations. They are always able by their diving to gather signs of the approach of a wind storm. When they see a threatening tempest, they quickly 'fly back from mid-ocean' and withdraw 'while their screams rebound on the shore'—to safety! What shall I say of the waterfowl—a bird that finds delight in the depths of the sea? Soon he sports in the shallows, after taking refuge from the sea's upheaval which he foresaw. And the heron that is found to frequent the marshes 'quits his familiar haunts' and, fearful of the rain storms, 'soars above the clouds' to escape the storms generated in that region. Let us take note of the different varieties of sea birds, who at the coming of a wind storm take refuge in marshy regions, where they find a safer and for the

moment a more pleasant habitation. They rummage round after their familiar food in some remote corner of the world.<sup>4</sup>

(44) Who does not marvel at the nightly sentry watches of the geese, who give evidence of their vigilance by their constant cackling? That was the way in which they defended even the Roman Capitol from the Gauls. You, Rome, rightfully owe to them the preservation of your empire. Your gods were sleeping, but the geese were awake. And so on those festal days you perform sacrifices, not to Jupiter, but to a goose; your gods give way to the geese, who were once their defenders, as they came to realize. The gods themselves might have been taken prisoners were it not for their aid.<sup>5</sup>

### Chapter 14

(44) After our description of the various fishes we have appropriately taken up next in order the subject of those birds that are also associated with water, in so far as they, too, in a similar fashion find pleasure in the art of swimming. Hence these birds seem to be primarily related to the fish species, since each has a certain element in common, that of being able to swim. The second elements which fishes and birds also share lies in the fact that the art of flying is an aspect of that of swimming. As a fish cuts through the water in the act of swimming, so a bird 'cuts the air'<sup>1</sup> in his swift flight. Both species are provided in a similar way with tails and 'with the orage of wings.'<sup>2</sup> So the fish directs himself forward and advances to distant points by the aid of his wings [fins]. He uses his tail as a rudder in order to guide

4 Virgil, *Georgics* 1.361,362,364,365; cf. 383,384.

5 Cf. Servius on *Aeneid* 8.652; see *Speculum* 2 (1927) 477.

1 Virgil, *Georgics* 1.406.

2 A Virgilian expression; cf. *Aeneid* 6.19.

himself or change his route by a sudden movement from one area to another. Birds also exercise their wings in the air as if they were floating on water, using them in the way one would use one's arms. By use of their tails they are able to direct themselves upward or downward at will.

Hence, while all of these species follow the same pattern, they are but complying with the divine precept that places the origin of both in water. For God said: 'Let the waters bring forth reptiles, living creatures according to their kind, and winged creatures flying above the earth along the firmament of heaven, each according to its kind.'<sup>3</sup> Not without reason, therefore, do both species have the innate faculty of swimming, since both have their origin in water.

(46) While, of course, both the slimy snake and all species of serpents—who derive their name from the fact that they creep, not walk—and the dragon, too, like the general run of fish are without legs, nevertheless there is no species of bird devoid of the use of legs. They need to obtain food from the earth. For this reason they use the support that legs give as a necessary aid in acquiring their natural food. Accordingly, other birds like the hawk and the eagle, who live by plunder, are provided with claws to catch their prey. Others make fitting use of them in the acts of either walking or of searching for food.

(47) There is one name for 'bird,' but there are various species. Who can know them all or hold their names in memory? There are birds, for example, who live on flesh. Hence, they have sharp claws, a curved and sharp beak, and are swift on the wing. Thus they live by plunder, and are able to lay hold of what they pursue, and with their beaks and claws eviscerate it. There are birds, also, that search for and find their food in seeds. Others search for different kinds of food as they come upon them.

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<sup>3</sup> Gen. 1.20-23.



There is diversity, too, in the way in which they group together. Those birds that are intent on plunder are devoid of this tendency. They do not act in common, because of their rapacity and the necessity of snaring their prey. Hence they disassociate themselves from groups—for greed avoids participation—moreover, a large flock would easily betray its own purposes. For birds of this sort there is no group life except that of conjugal relationship. This is the mode of life among the eagles and hawks. On the other hand, birds such as doves, cranes, starlings, crows, ravens, and even thrushes flock together for the most part.

(48) There are also other species of birds. Some are stationary, that is, stay in one place. Others are migratory birds who fly off to other regions and return at the end of winter. Still others return to us in winter time and fare abroad in summer. In the former case they seek a warmer climate in winter. In the latter case they spend the summer each year in those places which they know to be pleasanter. Hence thrushes return at the end of autumn when winter is already beginning and summer has passed for them. We contrive snares for them, acting as cruel hosts. We catch them in different ways, either by surprising them when they land or by deceiving them by a whistling sound, or by trying 'to snare game in toils.'<sup>4</sup> The stork returns, holding high the standard of spring. The crane, because of his partiality for flying high, often finds delight in voyaging afar.

(49) Some birds submit themselves to be handled. They are 'accustomed to the table,'<sup>5</sup> and are delighted to be fondled. Other birds shrink from this through fear. Some find pleasure in frequenting man's habitations, whereas others choose to live in remote deserts, where their difficulties in procuring food find compensation in their love of liberty.

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<sup>4</sup> Virgil, *Georgics* 1.139.

<sup>5</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.490.



Some birds utter cries, while others delight us with sweet and modulated song. Certain birds by nature, others by training, learn 'to match the measures'<sup>6</sup> of different tones, so much so that you would think a man, and not a bird, had spoken. How sweet is the voice of the blackbird; how distinct the words of the parrot!

There are also other birds; some guileless like the dove, or artful like the partridge. The cock is inclined to be boastful; the peacock, to be vain. There are birds, too, that display diversities in their lives and habits. Some love to consult together in groups, thus helping to form by their combined strength a state of their own under a king.<sup>7</sup> Other birds love to look out, each one for his own interest, avoiding a systematic rule, and, when captured, long 'to quit a slavery'<sup>8</sup> that is disdainful to them!

### Chapter 15

(50) Let us begin, then, with those birds which have become examples for our own way of life. These birds have a natural social and military organization, whereas with us this service is compulsory and servile. How well do the cranes carry out their guard duty at night without orders and without compulsion! You may note the watchers at their appointed places. Again, while the rest of the flock is at rest, some make the rounds and make certain that no attack is attempted from any quarter. With unabated vigilance they render complete protection. When the watcher has completed his period for guard duty, he prepares for sleep, after arousing with a warning cry the sleeper who is destined to

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 6.646.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 4.212.

<sup>8</sup> Virgil, *Eclogues* 1.41.

take his place as the next sentry. The latter willingly accepts his lot. He does not act as is the custom with us when, under such circumstances, we are loath to give up our sleep. Rather, he rises eagerly from his resting place, performs his duty, and repays with equal care and courtesy the favors that he has received. Hence there are no deserters, because their loyalty is a natural one. Hence their guard duty furnishes real protection, because their wills are free.

(51) They also follow this procedure when in flight. In this way they alleviate fatigue as they perform in turn the function of leadership. At a certain prescribed time one takes, a position ahead of the rest, in advance of the banners, so to speak. Later, he turns back and yields to a successor the task of leading the flock. What is nobler than this, wherein toil and preferment is open to all, where power is not the privilege of the few, but is distributed in voluntary fashion equally among all?

(52) This was the functional process of the primitive community. It resembled the constitution of a free state. From the beginning men began in this manner to establish a political system based on nature, with the birds as models. Thus there was equal participation in both labor and office. Each individual in his turn learned to set up a division of responsibilities, to take his share in doing service and in supervising it. Thus no one was devoid of office and no one was without his allotment of work.<sup>1</sup>

Here was an ideal state where no one became accustomed to unbroken power. Again, no one was intimidated by a long period of servitude, because advancement, due to interchange of office and to the fitting measure of its duration, appeared all the more supportable in that it resulted in establishing that each one would have a share in the task of government. No one ventured to exact servitude of another

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1 Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 4.149-196 (bees).

when the latter in his term of office could retaliate with frowns of scorn. Toil was not heavy when the thought of a dignified office in the future could bring comforting relief.

But when the lust for domination began to arrogate to itself powers that were acquired, and when this same lust encouraged unwillingness to relinquish powers that were assumed, when military service began to take on the character of servitude rather than of a right shared by all, when men were more eager to seize power than to follow due process of law to attain it—when this became a fact, then the performance of hard tasks was regarded as a burden and what was not undertaken voluntarily left the way open for displays of negligence. How unwillingly do men submit to be assigned to guard duty, how difficult it is to induce anyone to accept a perilous post in camp, when the vigil is imposed by the command of a king! Penalties are set for neglect of duty. Yet, indifference often asserts itself and the sentries fail to be vigilant. That necessity which imposes obedience on the unwilling is often accompanied by a loathing, for nothing is so easy as not to seem difficult to one who acts unwillingly. Therefore, unbroken toil repels good will. Continuous and prolonged power breeds arrogance. Where can you find a man who of his own volition lays down his imperial office, gives up the insignia of his leadership, and willingly moves from the first position to take his place among the last?<sup>2</sup> Not only do we struggle to reach first place, we are often concerned even about a position of modest import. We lay claim to the first position at a banquet and, moreover, we desire that what has once been assigned to us should be ours in perpetuity.

On the other hand, the cranes carry out their activities with equanimity and perform their official duties with humility. They are instructed to take up in their turn the post of

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2 Cf. Mark 9.34.

watch. No admonishment is necessary that they lay down their powers. In the former situation the tranquillity of natural sleep has to be broken; in the latter, an occasion presents itself to show their pleasure in the performance of a voluntary act of service.

### *Chapter 16*

(53) It is related that storks proceed in orderly array in the direction in which they propose to advance and that in many places in the East they form ranks together as if they were soldiers marching under the command of an officer. You could well believe that you were witnessing an army going forward with banners displayed—such is the pageant of military precision which they show. They are under the leadership and direction of crows who accompany them, providing a stout escort and auxiliary force against any attacking army of birds. They undertake at their own risk campaigns that are planned by others. A proof of this is deduced from the fact that these crows are not found to stay any length of time in these regions. Moreover, when they return, they are covered with wounds. Clear evidence of their having undergone a severe and bitter conflict may be gathered from what may be termed their cries of blood and from other indications. Who, then, has set forth for them the penalty for desertion? Who has laid down the laws of severe punishment for dereliction of military duty? The fact is, no one attempts to steal away from the lines of these friendly escorting troops. On the contrary, each one strives to outdo his companions in carrying out his allotted task.

(54) Let men learn to preserve the rights of hospitality and from the example of birds realize what reverence is due and what courtesies accorded to one's guests—courtesies

which expose crows even to danger. Whereas birds offer even their own lives for strangers, we close our doors to them. We ban from our doors those birds who at the risk of peril to themselves serve as escort to others. Whereas the storks consider these as their defenders, we frequently treat them as enemies.

I may be in error, but this may have been the reason why the people of Sodom suffered punishment or why the fury of the Egyptians, when they attempted war on the people who had been their guests, brought its penalty for their lack of hospitality when the waters overwhelmed that perfidious race.

(55) We should dwell on the fact that while the gentleness of human beings is equal to the loyalty and wisdom of this bird [the stork], none of us have effectively imitated the virtues of irrational creatures, not even when an example has been set before our eyes. In fact, the offspring, gathering around the body of their 'father sick unto death,'<sup>1</sup> cherish with the movement of their wings the limbs of their parent, now, because of his advanced age, bereft of his plumage and deprived 'of the oarage of his pinions.'<sup>2</sup> Furthermore—need I add—the offspring offer a contribution of food, wherewith loss of natural strength is repaired, so that, lifting by the leverage of their wings their aged parent, they make him fit for flight and restore to strength their dear father's limbs, now unaccustomed to perform their primary functions.

Who is there among us who is not loath to lift up the burden of his ailing father? Who would place his 'wearied sire' on his own shoulders<sup>3</sup>—a fact which is scarcely credible when related in history? Who would not rather, to fulfil his duty, hand this out over to servants? The birds do not refuse to provide food for their parents. This duty many men

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1 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 12.395.

2 A Virgilian phrase.

3 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.596,707,708.



have refused to do even under compulsion of necessity and when driven by fear of punishment. Birds, on the other hand, are bound by a natural and not by a written code of laws.<sup>4</sup> By no ordinances, but rather by the prescriptions of natural grace, they carry unashamedly the body of a revered and aged parent. This act of carrying one's parent is, in fact, an expression of piety. Popular belief has borne witness to it to the extent that it has acquired, as is fitting, a merited fame. The Romans are accustomed to call this bird 'pious'—a title which these birds have without exception merited has been bestowed by decree of the Senate on scarcely a single emperor. These birds have been accorded this designation by a decree of their own elders, for it is right that sons be first declared 'pious' by virtue of what their fathers believed. They also have the approval of all mankind, for 'thankfulness' is called ἀντιπελάργησις, a word derived from πελαργός, which means a stork. Such is the derivation of the word denoting this virtue. A repayment for kindness is associated with the name of the stork.

### Chapter 17

(56) We have an example of devotion to parents on the part of a bird's progeny. Let us now listen to an impressive instance of a mother's solicitude for her children. The swallow has a very small body, but gives evidence of extremely great affection and devotion. Although devoid of all goods, she constructs her nest as cunningly as if it were a thing 'more precious than gold.'<sup>1</sup> What wiser act is there for a bird given to wandering than that she should avail

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Cicero, *Pro Milone* 4.10.

<sup>1</sup> Prov. 16.16.



herself of her liberty and build for her little ones homes near the abodes of men, where no one would attack her brood? It is a commendable act to cause her nestlings from their very birth to become accustomed to human society and thus make them safer from the snares of their bird enemies. Notable, too, is the admirable way she, like a skilled artisan, builds her home without a helper. She gathers twigs in her beak and dips them in the mire so as to fasten them together. Because she is unable to lift the mire with her feet, she sprinkles the tops of her wings with waters so that what before was dry dust now becomes mud. In this way twigs and straw are collected and made compact. Thus is the entire nest built. The nestlings find no obstacles as they busy themselves on the smooth surface within their little house. At the same time, no intruder can damage the structure by planting his feet in an opening. The young ones, too, are not affected by draughts of cold air.

(57) This industrious activity is common to many birds. The extraordinary characteristics just mentioned show the high regard they have for paternal affection and are an indication of a far-seeing and instinctive knowledge. These birds give evidence of possessing a medical skill. If any of the nestlings suffers blindness as a result of an injury to an eye, its eyes are restored to their former effectiveness by the application of certain curative agents.

Let no one, therefore, complain of poverty because he has not provided money for his household. The swallow, who lacks money, is poorer—but is rich in industry. She builds and spends not. She erects a shelter without depriving a neighbor of anything. She experiences no compulsion to harm anyone, either because of indigence or poverty. She does not resign herself to despair when at times her offspring becomes helpless. We on the other hand, are affected by poverty and are made anxious by the urgency of want. Indigence drives

many to evil deeds and offenses. In the pursuit of gain we turn our minds to deceit and, while fitting our sentiments to the occasion, we set our hopes in the most violent displays of passion. In the process our minds snap. We lie prone, bereft of spirit and life at a time when it would have been more satisfactory, since the protection of man has failed us, to place our hopes in the benevolence of God.

### *Chapter 18*

(58) Men should learn to love their children. We find this to be a normal sentiment among crows, who form a constant escort to their offspring in flight. Solicitous, too, lest perchance they may become weak because of their tender age, they strive to supply them with food. They continue to perform this function for a long time. On the other hand, the females of our species quickly give up nursing even those they love or, if they belong to the wealthier class, disdain the act of nursing. Those who are very poor expose their infants and refuse to lay claim to them when they are discovered. Even the wealthy, in order that their inheritance may not be divided among several, deny in the very womb their own progeny. By the use of parricidal mixtures they snuff out the fruit of their wombs in the genital organs themselves. In this way life is taken away before it is given.

Who except man himself has taught us ways of repudiating children? Who has discovered such cruel parental customs? Who, notwithstanding the fact that nature imposes equality among brothers, has caused them to be unequal? One has a superabundance from his father's legacy. The other bewails the fact that he has been given but a miserable portion of his father's rich patrimony. Can we say that nature has thus apportioned the deserts of these sons? On

everyone she has bestowed on an equal basis the possibility of possessing wherewith to be born and wherewith to live. She can teach you not to discriminate in inheritance those whom you made equal by right of consanguinity. It stands to reason that those to whom you have granted the right to be born in the same manner should not themselves be begrudged to have that in common which by nature they have inherited.

(59) Hawks are said to show harshness toward their own offspring. They eject them from their nests when they notice their first attempts at flight. If they still linger, they are immediately pushed headlong by their parents, who beat them with their wings and compel them to perform the fearful action. At no time after that do they perform their office of giving sustenance to their young. Yet why should we wonder that birds accustomed to plunder find it distasteful to nourish their progeny? Let us keep in mind the fact that fear schools birds also to be cautious, never to relax their watchful care, but to anticipate and avoid dangers from birds of prey. Hence, since nature has inured these birds to a life of plunder, they appear to prepare their young from an early age to acts of pillage rather than just cut short the period of sustenance. Precaution is taken lest they become flabby in that early period, or become weak through pampering, or lest they languish in idleness. They are trained to search for food rather than expect it, so that they may not lose their innate vigor. Those activities are allowed to elapse which are connected with the nourishing of the young, who as a result of this are forced to resort to a life of pillage.

(60) It is generally stated in treatises dealing with the eagle that she, too, abandons her young. This is true, however, only of one out of two nestlings. Some have thought this situation arose from a reluctance to bring up a twin brood. But this is hardly worthy of credence, especially since

Moses has given us such convincing testimony on the devotion of this bird to her young when he said: 'As the eagle protects his nest and inspires trust in his nestlings: hovering over them, he spreads his wings and hath taken them and carried them on his shoulders. The Lord alone led them.'<sup>1</sup> How, then, did he spread his wings over his young if he killed one of them?

For this reason I think that this bird does not act cruelly from a desire to refrain from giving nourishment. Rather, there is a question of making a decision. For it is agreed that the eagle tests the quality of her young, lest signs of degeneracy and deformity may cause deterioration in a species which affects the role of regal dominion over all birds. And so it is asserted that the eagle exposes her nestlings to the rays of the sun and suspends with her claws her young in mid-air. If one of them stays unruffled and unmoved, fearlessly facing the light of the sun as it strikes his eyes, he is approved. He has thus demonstrated the truth of nature by the steadiness of his unaffected gaze. The one, however, who turns away his eyes, 'dazzled by the sun's rays,'<sup>2</sup> is rejected. He is deemed unworthy of such a parent, unfitted to be recognized as genuine offspring, and hence undeserving of support. The eagle does not therefore reject her young because of natural cruelty. This is, rather, the result of her soundness of judgment. There is no refusal of what is native, but rather a rejection of what is alien.

(61) What some consider to be a disposition toward cruelty in such a royal bird is compensated by the kindly traits of a bird of lower caste. This bird, known as the waterfowl (the Greek name is *φενη*), adopts the nestling of the eagle when disowned or not recognized and allows him to mingle with her own brood. She exercises over him the same

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<sup>1</sup> Deut. 32.11.

<sup>2</sup> Cicero, *De senectute* 12.42.

maternal care as she does over her own, providing food and nourishment impartially. The φενη, therefore, supports an alien brood, whereas we show excessive cruelty when we abandon our own children. Rather, she does not acknowledge them to be such, but considers them to be base-born. Our procedure is worse. We renounce what we acknowledge to be our own.

### *Chapter 19*

(62) Let us come now to the turtle dove, chosen as a chaste victim by the Law of God. Hence, when the Lord was circumcised, the dove was offered, because it is written in the Law that there should be a presentation of 'a pair of turtles or two young pigeons.'<sup>1</sup> For this is the true sacrifice of Christ: chastity of body and grace of the spirit. Chastity belongs to the turtle dove; grace, to the pigeon. It is related that the turtle dove, when widowed by the loss of her consort, was 'utterly weary of the bridal-bed' and even of the world itself, for the reason that 'her first love, turning traitor, cheated her by death.'<sup>2</sup> He was regarded as unfaithful from the point of view of perpetuity and as dour in respect to beauty in that he had created more pain as a result of his death than sweetness from his love. Therefore, she renounces any other marriage alliance and does not break the laws of chastity or her pledges to her beloved, reserving for him alone her love, for him alone cherishing the name of wife. Learn, women, how great are the joys of that widowhood which even birds are said to observe.

(63) Who has given these laws to the turtle dove? A search for a human law-giver will not bring results. No one has ventured to propound laws for these birds. Not even Paul

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 2.24; Lev. 12.8.

<sup>2</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* 4.17,18 (Dido).



has succeeded in doing so in the question as to whether a widow should remarry or not. He says: 'I desire therefore that the younger widows marry, bear children, rule their households and give the adversary no occasion for abusing us.' And elsewhere: 'It is good for them if they so remain. But if they do not have the self-control, let them marry, for it is better to marry than to burn.'<sup>3</sup> Paul wishes that women should do that which is customary with the turtle doves. Also, he exhorts the younger widows to marry because our women are unable to maintain the chaste life of these birds. God has therefore infused into the turtle dove this sentiment for the virtuous practice of continency. He alone has the power to prescribe the laws which all are obliged to follow. The turtle dove is not inflamed by the flower of youth, is not tempted by occasional enticements, and cannot break her first pledge, because she knows how to preserve the chastity she promised at the time of her first marriage.

### *Chapter 20*

(64) We have spoken of widowhood as it appears in the life of birds. We have shown how this virtue first arose among them. Now let us discuss the virtue of continency—a virtue which birds are said also to possess. This virtue can be found even among vultures. It is said that vultures 'do not indulge in conjugal embraces' or in any sort of union or nuptial tie. They are said to conceive without contact with the male seed and that without the union of sexes they generate offspring that live to a ripe old age. In fact, it is asserted that they live as long as a hundred years and that by no means does 'the limit of a natural span of life await them.'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Tim. 5.14; 1 Cor. 7.8.

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<sup>1</sup> Virgil, *Georgics* 4.198, 206 (bees).



(65) What do those people say who usually ridicule our mysteries when they hear that a virgin gave birth to a child—people who consider that parturition is impossible to one who never had any relations with a man? Is that to be thought impossible for the Mother of God which is admitted to be possible in the case of vultures? A bird gives birth without contact with a male. No one has cast any doubt on that. But because Mary, though unwedded, brought forth a child, they raise doubts about her chastity. Do not our observations show that the Lord has provided many precedents in the realm of nature by which to prove the glory of His own Incarnation and assert its veracity?

### *Chapter 21*

(66) Now I shall proceed to show what birds usually live under the control of laws in a sort of commonwealth. From this is derived the fact that the state establishes laws bearing equally on all citizens—laws which are loyally observed by all members of the community. No claim is made to a right which is clearly not permitted to all the citizens. Rather, each and every member of the group shares equally in these rights. What is not permitted to every citizen is not considered a right. All share in paying respects to their elders, by whose wise counsel the state is governed. Each one has a right to the common place of abode. Social duties are shared. They all follow a single prescribed and orderly mode of life.

(67) These facts are of great importance. In the case of bees they are even more important. Alone of all species of living creatures they share their offspring in common. All have the same abode and are confined within the limits of

one native land. They engage in the same labor. They share the same food and partake of the same activities. The same productivity is shared and—what could be more notable—the same flight on the wing. The act of generation is common to all. Their bodies are uncontaminated in the common act of parturition, since they have no part in conjugal embraces. They do not unnerve their bodies in love nor are they torn by the travail of childbirth. A mighty swarm of young suddenly appears. They gather their offspring in their mouths from the surface of leaves and from sweet herbs.<sup>1</sup>

(68) They appoint a king for themselves and establish their own community. Though they serve under a king, they are free. They have the privilege of selection and of extending their loyal devotion. They love him as one elected by them and they pay him honor by producing a swarming hive.

The king is not chosen by lot, because there is in a lot, not an element of discrimination, but one of chance. By virtue of the unpredictable nature of a lot, it frequently happens that what comes last is preferred to what is better. The election is not brought about by the vulgar shouts of an uninformed mob which does not hold in esteem the merits due to virtue. The mob scrutinizes, not the benefits to be bestowed by what is serviceable for all, but is swayed by the incertitude of change. This election, moreover, is not founded on hereditary privilege or in dynastic succession, since circumspection and wisdom cannot exist in one who is so inexperienced in public life. Add to this the flatteries and the inordinate pleasures which, imbibed at an early age, are apt to weaken men of the best natural endowments. Then, again, we note the custom of employing eunuchs; most of them tend to sway the king more for their own profit than for the public good.

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<sup>1</sup> Virgil, *Georgics* 4.197-201.

There are notable and natural characteristics in the king as he appears among the bees. He must be, for example, outstanding in size and beauty. Besides that, he must possess what is a conspicuous trait in a king—gentleness in character. He does not make use of his sting to inflict punishment. There are well-defined laws in nature; not set down in writing, but impressed in the mold of custom, by virtue of which those who possess the greatest power tend to be more lenient in the exercise of it. Those bees who do not obey the laws of their king are so overcome by remorse that they even kill themselves by their own stings!

This custom is observed today by the Persians. They inflict death on themselves in punishment for a transgression. But no people—neither the Persians whose subjects live under the severest laws nor the Indians or Sarmatians—hold their kings in such high esteem as do the bees.<sup>2</sup> So true is this that they dare not leave their abodes nor go in search of food except when the king takes the initiative by assuming for himself primacy in flight.

(69) They fly over the countryside with its fragrant gardens and sweetly smelling flowers, where a brook steals through banks of lush grass. There the young bees find occasion for spirited sport. There, too, they perform their martial exercises and find relaxation from labors. Their toil is sweet. From the flowers and the plants they erect the foundations for their camps. What is the honeycomb but a sort of camp? Hence 'they drive the drones from these folds.' Does not the square-shaped form of a camp compare favorably for beauty of construction with the art of the honeycomb in which tiny rounded cells are interlocked? What architect taught them how to arrange symmetrically the walls of these separate cells, how to hang aloft 'within

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2 *Ibid.* 4.210-212.

the confines of their homes' delicate pieces of wax—to staff all this with honey and 'swell with nectar,' as it were, their granaries interwoven with flowers?<sup>3</sup>

You can perceive them all engaged in their tasks. Some keep guard over the food supply. Others keep anxious watch on the camp. Others are on the alert for possible rainstorms and cloudbursts. Some fashion the wax obtained from flowers, while still others gather in their mouths the dew that settles on these same flowers. Yet no one lays snares to pilfer the fruits of another's labors or aims 'to live by plunder.'<sup>4</sup> Would that they did not fear the cunning stratagems of thieves! However, they still can resort to their stings and, if they should be aroused, infuse poison into the honey. In the heat of attack 'they lay down their lives in the wound.'<sup>5</sup>

And so into the recesses of their camp abodes the moisture of the dew is poured. This in the course of time is gradually transformed into honey. What before was liquid takes on the sweetness of honey as a result of the infusion of wax together with the aroma of flowers.

(70) Scripture rightly commends the bee as a good worker: 'Behold the bee, see how busy she is, how admirable in her industry, the results of whose labors are serviceable to kings and commoners and are sought after by all men.'<sup>6</sup> Do you hear what the Prophet says? He enjoins on you to follow the example of that tiny bee and to imitate her work. You see how pleasing it is and what labor it entails. Her fruit is desired and sought after by all men. Its recipients do not differ in character. It supplies without distinction the same sweetness to kings and to commoners. It contributes not to our pleasures alone, but to our health as well. It

<sup>3</sup> This entire section reflects numerous passages of *Georgics* 4.19-169.

<sup>4</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.749; 9.613.

<sup>5</sup> Virgil, *Georgics* 4.238.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Prov. 6.8 (on the ant).

soothes our throats and ministers to our wounds. Even to our organic ills it serves as a healing draught. Thus the bee, though weak in body, manifests her strength in the vigor of her wisdom and in her high regard for virtuous deeds.

(71) The bees fight, in fact, to their utmost in defense of their king. They consider it a noble act to give up their lives for his sake. While the king is safe, they stand by him with the greatest devotion. When he is lost, their enthusiasm for their work declines. They destroy their store of honey, because death has come to the prime mover of their enterprise.<sup>7</sup>

(72) Although other winged creatures scarcely bring forth offspring once a year, the bee is blessed with two such periods, surpassing to such a degree all other [such] creatures in fecundity.<sup>8</sup>

## Chapter 22

(73) Let us now examine the sense of the words, 'Let the waters abound with life and above the earth let winged creatures fly below the firmament of the heavens.'<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that 'above the earth' is said because they search for their food on the earth. But why, 'below the firmament'? Eagles fly above all other birds, yet they do not fly 'below the firmament of the heavens.' The word for 'heaven' in Greek is οὐρανός, derived from the Greek word 'to see,' for the reason that the air is clear and transparent and so living species are said to fly through the air. One should not be disturbed by the phrase 'below the firmament of the heavens.' The word 'firmament' is used, not in its proper, but in its derivative sense. The air which we perceive

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 4.212-214.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 4.231.

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 1.20.



with our eyes is, in comparison with that ethereal substance, the firmament, of greater thickness and density.

(74) Now, having discussed just briefly the nature and beauty of flying creatures (we do not have time to describe every creature of the same or similar species), let us consider what diversity there is among birds themselves.

We find that the crow has talons which are divided and separated, whereas nature has formed that part differently in the raven, even in her young. Those birds that feed on flesh have hooked talons, to enable them to seize their prey. Those that are accustomed to swimming have feet which are broad, with their parts bound and joined together by a kind of membrane. Here we find examples of admirable design in nature. In one case, flight or the acquisition of food is made easier. In the other, assistance is given in the art of swimming, whereby this act, too, is made easier. They use their feet as oars in such a manner that a current of water is propelled by the broad formation of the membrane attached to their feet.

(75) We can easily comprehend why a swan has a rather long neck. With a body that is somewhat corpulent, the swan cannot easily reach the lowest depths in search for food. Hence, the neck acts as a sort of advance scout for the rest of the body when on the lookout for food in the deep waters. This long neck has the additional advantage of giving a sweeter and more modulated tone to the swan's cry, which becomes clearer the more frequently it is exercised.

(76) How sweet is the chant from the tiny throat of a cicada! In the heat of midsummer 'they rend the thickets'<sup>2</sup> with their songs. The greater the heat at midday, the more musical become their songs, because the purer the air they breathe at that time, the clearer does the song resound.

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<sup>2</sup> Virgil, *Georgics* 3.328.



The bees, too, have a song that is not unpleasant. In that hoarse voice of theirs is an agreeable sweetness which we appear to have first imitated 'in the broken trumpet-blasts.'<sup>3</sup> There is no sound more fitting than this to arouse hearts to vigorous action. Yet they have this curious gift, although they are said not to possess the function of breathing through lungs, but to breathe in the air as food. Hence they die immediately if oil is poured over them, because they are unable to take in that breath of air when their pores are closed. If one were straightway to pour vinegar over them, they quickly revive, since vinegar has the power of quickly opening those pores which had been sealed by the mass of oil.

### *Chapter 23*

(77) Now that we are discussing flying creatures, it may not be amiss to treat here what is reported by certain eye-witnesses about the Indian worm. It is related that this horned worm is first changed into the form of a plant stalk,<sup>1</sup> then gradually into a chrysalis. This form is not retained, for it seems to take on wings when seen on the wide surface of a leaf. From these leaves the Chinese 'comb those soft fleeces'<sup>2</sup> which the wealthy appropriate for their own use. Hence the Lord says: 'What did you go out to the desert to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Behold, those who wear soft garments are in the houses of kings.'<sup>3</sup>

The chameleon is said also to assume new forms by a deceptive change of color. We know, in fact, from close

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 4.72.

<sup>1</sup> St. Basil in his *Commentary on Gen.* 184D has the correct information here (caterpillar).

<sup>2</sup> Virgil, *Georgics* 2.121.

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 11.7,8.

observation that hares take on a white color in winter and that in summer they return to their original shade.

(78) These matters have been mentioned in order that you may be aroused by the force of such examples as these to a belief in the change which will be ours at the Resurrection. We refer to that change which the Apostle clearly indicates when he says: 'We shall all indeed rise, but we shall not all be changed.' And further on he says: 'And the dead shall rise incorruptible and we shall be changed. For this corruptible body must put on incorruption and this mortal body must put on immortality.'<sup>4</sup> Many, interpreting the nature and appearance of that transformation which they have not attained, are not without giving it an incongruous explanation, based on an anticipation which they do not merit.

(79) In the regions of Arabia there is reported to be a bird called the phoenix.<sup>5</sup> This bird is said to reach the ripe old age of 500 years. When the phoenix realizes that he is coming to the end of his life, he builds himself a casket of incense, myrrh, and other aromatic plants, into which he enters and dies when his time has come. From the moisture proceeding from his flesh he comes to life again. In the course of time this bird puts on 'the orange of his wings'<sup>6</sup> until he is restored to his primitive form and appearance. By the very act of his resurrection the phoenix furnishes us a lesson by setting before us the very emblems of our own resurrection without the aid of precedent or of reason. We accept the fact that birds exist for the sake of man. The contrary is not true: that man exists for the sake of birds. We have here an example of the loving care which the Author and

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. 15:51-53.

<sup>5</sup> The phoenix was considered as an example from nature of the certainty of our resurrection; see Clement of Rome, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 25.

<sup>6</sup> A Virgilian phrase.

Creator of the birds has for His own saints.<sup>7</sup> These He does not allow to perish, just as He does not permit in the case of one sole bird when He willed that the phoenix should rise again, born of his own seed. Who, then, announces to him the day of his death, so that he makes for himself a casket, fills it with goodly aromas, and then enters it to die there where pleasant perfumes succeed in crowding out the foul odor of death?

(80) You, too, man, should avail yourself of a casket: 'strip off the old man with his deeds and put on the new.'<sup>8</sup> Your casket, your sheath, is Christ who protects and conceals you in the day of evil. Do you wish to be convinced that it is a casket of protection? 'In my quiver he hath hidden me,'<sup>9</sup> Scripture declares. The casket, then, is your faith. Fill it with the goodly aroma of your virtues, that is, of chastity, compassion, and justice, and immerse yourself wholly in the inmost mysteries of faith, which are fragrant with the sweet odors of your significant deeds. May your exit from this life find you clothed with that faith, so that 'your bones may be made fat' and 'be like a watered garden,'<sup>10</sup> thus coming to life and flourishing. Be aware, therefore, of the day of your death, as the Apostle Paul realized when he said: 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. There is laid up for me a crown of justice.'<sup>11</sup> Like the good phoenix, he entered his casket, filling it with the sweet aroma of martyrdom.

(81) I shall put this question before you: Why are vultures able by certain indications to foretell a man's death? Whence have they derived their knowledge? When two armies face each other in battle array to engage in

7 Cf. Ps. 15.10; Acts 13.35.

8 Col. 3.9,10.

9 Isa. 49.2.

10 Prov. 15.30; Isa. 58.11.

11 2 Tim. 4.7,8.

'tearful war,'<sup>12</sup> these particular birds follow in formation as a sign that a great number of men are destined to fall a prey to vultures. At any rate, they seem to make this observation by the exercise of an instinct analogous to human reasoning.

(82) Divine grace has penetrated even into the life of a locust. When a locust swarms over and takes possession of some extent of land, no harm at first is done to the land. Nothing is devoured by these unfriendly invaders except when a sign from heaven has been received. A passage in Exodus provides an example of this.<sup>13</sup> There the locust as minister of divine vengeance inflicts punishment for an offense against heaven.

(83) This animal is devoured in turn by a bird called *σελευκίς*—this is its Greek name—given to us as a remedy for the ills that the locust usually inflict. The Creator has given this bird an insatiable appetite wherewith the all-devouring plague, to which we have just referred, can be utterly destroyed.

### *Chapter 24*

(84) But what is this that has happened? While we are prolonging our discourse, see how the birds of night flit around us! They admonish us by that very act to put an end to our discourse and at the same time give us a hint that they, too, should be included. Birds of different species all fly back to their accustomed nesting places. The coming of evening compels them to give way to night. Accordingly, they conceal themselves in their hiding places, saluting the close of day with a song, lest they depart without offering such thanks as a creature owes to glorify his Creator.

<sup>12</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.604.

<sup>13</sup> Exod. 10.12-15.

(85) Night also has its songs wherewith to soothe the hearts of men who lie awake. The night owl, too, makes a contribution of song. What shall I say of the nightingale who keeps long watch over her nest, cherishing her eggs with the warmth of her body? She solaces with the sweetness of her song the sleepless labors of a long night.<sup>1</sup> The highest aim of the nightingale, in my opinion, is to give life to her eggs by the sweet charm of her song no less than by the fostering warmth of her body. A woman, humble but chaste,<sup>2</sup> imitates this bird when she uses her arms to work 'the indented millstone,'<sup>3</sup> that her little ones may not lack bread for their sustenance. By her evening song she comforts herself amid the distressing realities of her poverty. In her love and attentiveness she follows the nightingale's pattern, although she fails to match the sweetness of the song.

(86) The night owl is insensible of the horrors accompanying the gloom of night because of the large yellow pupils of his eyes. Contrary to the experience of other birds—the darker the night, the freer the flight of the owl. However, when dawn with its bursts of light appears, his eyes are dazzled and he flees aimlessly as if in darkness. The owl provides us with a lesson that some there are who, although they have eyes to see, yet are unable to use them.<sup>4</sup> They exercise the function of sight solely in times of obscurity.

I speak of the eyes of the mind which the wise in this world have and see not.<sup>5</sup> They discern nothing in the light. They walk in obscurity, groping in the darkness of the demon powers, while they are convinced that they are looking at the heights of heaven. 'They trace with a rod' the

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1 Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 1.293.

2 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.409-413.

3 Virgil, *Georgics* 1.274.

4 Cf. Matt. 13.13.

5 Cf. Eph. 1.18.



universe,<sup>6</sup> taking the measure of the air itself. Nevertheless, they become more and more involved in the darkness of eternal sightlessness. Beside them are the daylight of Christ and the light of the Church, and they see them not. They open their mouths as if in possession of all knowledge. To subjects of little value their minds are acute, but to the eternal verities they are blind. In the prolixities of prolonged disputation they reveal the obscurity of their own knowledge. Therefore, while they flit around in subtle discourse, they act like the night owl by vanishing at the approach of the light of day.

(87) The bat is an ignoble creature, whose name is taken from the word for evening.<sup>7</sup> They are equipped with wings, but at the same time they are quadrupeds. They are provided with teeth, in this respect differing generally from other birds. As a quadruped, too, the female brings forth her young alive and not in the oval stage. Bats fly in the air like birds but prefer to be shrouded in the dusk of evening. In flight they do not use the support of wings but rely on their webbed feet which serve as wings, both as a balance and as a means of propulsion. These common creatures have this faculty, too, of adhering one to another, assuming any position like a pendant bunch of grapes, so that, if the lowest in place gives way they all fall apart. Here we see the virtue of love in action—a virtue difficult to find among men here below.

(88) The cock's crow is pleasant at nightfall. It is not only pleasant, but useful, too. As a good domesticated fowl he arouses the sleeper, gives him warning when he is perturbed, and consoles the voyager by asserting in musical

6 Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.850.

7 The etymology here is *verperitilio* ('bat') from *vesper* ('evening').

8 Cf. *Hymnica Ambrosiana* 1 (*Aeterne rerum conditor*); cf. O. J. Kuhnmuensch, *Early Christian Latin Poets* (Chicago 1929) 116; A. S. Walpole, *Early Latin Hymns* (Cambridge 1922) 27-34.



tones that night is approaching.<sup>8</sup> When the cock crows, the thief forsakes his schemes and the star of dawn rises to illumine the sky. When the cock crows, the sailor's gloom and trepidation disappear. Tempests and storms stirred up by gusts of wind at eveningtide subside. At his crowing the devout of heart bestir themselves for prayer and resume their reading. Finally, on this occasion 'the rock of the Church'<sup>9</sup> washed away his sin which he had committed before the cock crowed. At cock-crow hope returns to all, the sick find comfort, the wounded find relief, the feverish are calmed, the lapsed return to the faith. Jesus has regard for those who stumble and corrects the errant. Hence He paid heed to Peter and forthwith the sin departed. Peter revoked his denial and his confession was completed.<sup>10</sup> That this was God's plan and not a mere accident is revealed in the words of the Lord. It is written that Jesus said to Simon: 'Before the cock crows, thou wilt deny me three times.'<sup>11</sup>

In daytime Peter is quite brave, but is disturbed at night-fall. Before cock-crow he falls three times so that you may realize that his sin was not due to mere thoughtlessness, but to an emotional disturbance. The same man became braver after the cock crowed. He became worthy of Christ's regard, for 'the eyes of the Lord are upon the just.'<sup>12</sup> He realized that remedial action had come, following which he was unable to sin. He turned aside from the ways of error to those of virtue and wept bitterly.<sup>13</sup> He washed away his sins with his tears.

(89) Have regard, Lord Jesus, for us, also, that we may acknowledge our errors, efface our faults with tears of devotion and merit indulgence for our sins. And so we have

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9 Peter; Matt. 16.18.

10 Cf. Luke 22.61,62.

11 Matt. 26.34.

12 Ps. 33.16.

13 Matt. 26.75.

purposely prolonged our discussion in order that the cock may come also to us as we speak. Wherefore, if any error has obtruded itself in our speech, we pray that Christ forgive our sin. Grant us the tears of Peter. Deliver us from the sinner's exultation.

The Hebrews wept and were liberated when the waters of the sea divided. Pharaoh was glad because he had surrounded the Hebrews, but he was swallowed up in the sea along with his people. Judas, too, rejoiced in the price of betrayal, but by reason of the same price 'he hanged himself with a halter.'<sup>14</sup> Peter wept for his sins and deserved to be able to forgive the sins of others.

(90) But now it is fitting time<sup>15</sup> that this discourse be brought to an end—a time for silence or for tears, a time in which is celebrated the forgiveness of sins. For us, too, in our holy rites that mystical cock crows, as the cock of Peter did in our discourse. May Peter, who wept so well for himself, weep also for us and may the benign countenance of Christ turn toward us. Let there come upon us the Passion of the Lord Jesus which daily forgives us our sins and effects the office of remission.

(91) The good Lord does not desire to send you away fasting lest some faint on the way. He said: 'I have compassion on the crowd for they have now been with me three days and have nothing to eat and I am unwilling to send them away fasting lest they faint on the way'<sup>16</sup>—Mary took note of these words on the occasion when she declined to make preparations for a meal.<sup>17</sup> We, too, should realize the fact that those who live on the word of God<sup>18</sup> are not numerous and that refreshment for the body is what is more

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<sup>14</sup> Matt. 26.14; 27.5.

<sup>15</sup> Holy Thursday.

<sup>16</sup> Matt. 15.32.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Luke 10.39,40.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Matt. 4.4.

generally desired. In fact, more exacting than the triduum (which we have celebrated) is that which we propose for the day that approaches.

(92) And so, now that we have enjoyed ourselves with birds and have crowed with the cock, let us sing the mysteries of the Lord. Let the eagles,<sup>19</sup> when they have been rejuvenated,<sup>20</sup> gather by the body of Jesus, for now the mighty whale has really restored Jonas to us.<sup>21</sup> Let us congratulate ourselves that evening has come. The morning shall become—the sixth day!<sup>22</sup>

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19 Cf. Luke 17.37; Matt. 24.28.

20 Cf. Ps. 102.5.


21 Jonas 2.11.

22 Cf. Gen. 1.31.

## BOOK VI: THE SIXTH DAY

### THE NINTH HOMILY

#### *Chapter 1*

 HIS IS THE SIXTH DAY, which brings to a close the account of the origin of created things and at the same time terminates the discourse which we have undertaken on the genesis of matter.<sup>1</sup> This day calls for even greater expenditure of toil, because we have reached a critical point: the culmination of the whole debate. We must realize that during the preliminary stages of contests in music, song, or sport, however numerous and important they may be, there is no award of a wreath of victory. This presentation of a wreath for victory is assigned to the last day. On that occasion the expectant decision is reached, together with the shame or the reward which either defeat or victory brings. In such a mighty contest of wisdom as this in which every man, not just a few, acts as judge, how much more is there occasion for anxiety lest we fritter away the toils of the preceding days and suffer mortification in the present. The praetor does not face the same conditions as the singer or the athlete. In the

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lucretius 2.31,383 (*exordia rerum*).

latter case there is a sporting chance of misadventure,<sup>2</sup> in the former, an error may have serious results. If, in one instance, you make an error the spectators are censorious; in the other, the audience.

(2) Stand by me, therefore, as judges of the prize of victory. Enter with me into this mighty and wonderful theater of the whole visible creation. Not slight is the service rendered to strangers by one who watches for their arrival with the intent to conduct them on a tour around the city and to point out to them the more notable monuments. How much more ought you to welcome one who, as I do, conducts you in this assembly by the guiding hand of my discourse through your own native land and who points out to you each and every species and genus, with the desire to show you from all these examples how the Creator of the universe has conferred more abundant benefits on you than on all the rest of His creatures. It is for you, therefore, that the wreath is designed. It is my wish, with your express consent, to award to you today the crown of victory. We do not demand merely the garlands that athletes win which are destined at length to fade, but the lasting judgment of your probity, by which you are able to discern the truth that Divine Providence permeates all creatures. While you share with the rest of creatures your corporeal weakness, you possess above and beyond all other creatures a faculty of the soul which in itself has nothing in common with the rest of created things.

## *Chapter 2*

(3) Now let us turn our discussion to the origin of beasts and to the generation of men. I already hear some who murmur and say: how much time are we to spend discussing

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2 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 5.328-330.

matters alien to us, while knowing nothing of what really concerns us? How long are we to learn of other living creatures while we do not know ourselves? Let him tell me what is to be for my benefit, that I may know myself. That is a just complaint. The order which Scripture laid down must, however, be retained. We cannot fully know ourselves without first knowing the nature of all living creatures.

(4) 'Let the earth,' says Scripture, 'bring forth all kinds of living creatures, quadrupeds and crawling creatures and beasts of the earth and cattle and all manner of reptiles according to their kind. And God made the beasts of the earth and every kind of cattle and every kind of creature that crawls on the ground. And God saw that it was good and God said: let us make man.'<sup>1</sup> I am not unaware of the fact that certain men treat of the race of beasts and cattle and crawling creatures as symbolical of the heinousness of sin, the stupidity of sinners, and the wickedness of their designs. I adhere, however, to the belief that each and every species is uncompounded by nature.

(5) I am not afraid that someone may in his mind compare me to a presumptuous but poor host who, in his eagerness to be kind, invites many people to dinner. He sets before them nothing but the most common and ordinary food, so that he provokes criticism from his guests for the meanness of his service instead of being the recipient of gratitude for his generosity.

The friends of Eliseus did not accuse him of being a poor host when he placed wild herbs before them.<sup>2</sup> There exists that luxurious and delicately prepared banquet, hardly worthy of our notice, in which pheasants and a species of turtle are placed on the table, while chicken is actually what is served. A chicken is offered, stuffed with oysters or shell-fish. Wine

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<sup>1</sup> Gen.. 1.20-24.

<sup>2</sup> 4 Kings 4.39-43.



is drunk which from its bouquet seems to be of one kind, but from its taste seems to be of another. Food derived from the sea is stuffed with products of the land and those of the land with what is derived from the sea. We call into question in this way the providence of the Creator who has granted all these things for our sustenance without, however, mingling them one with another. At first sight, such a mixture seems pleasing. Afterward, it turns out to be bitter, for the more luxurious is our mode of living, the more ruinous and intemperate it becomes. Eliseus served bitter herbs which afterwards became sweet. Hence, those who thought that the food was of a deadly nature found it later to be sweet and life-giving.

(6) Again, there is no occasion for concern that I might have invited more people than I can possibly provide with food and that the bread of my discourse may not be sufficient for you all. We cannot attain to the perfection of faith exemplified in the case of Eliseus, who was not disturbed by the small amount of bread in his possession. It was his wish and intention to distribute it among all in sufficient amount. Accordingly, he instructed his servant to divide among the people the ten barley loaves. And his servant said: 'How much is this to set before a hundred men?' Eliseus replied: 'Give that they may eat for thus said the Lord; they shall eat and there shall be left.'<sup>3</sup> And I do not fear that your situation may make you ravenous. You have had your fill, yet you are returning home both hungry and empty, for it is written: 'The Lord strengtheneth the just and in the days of famine they shall be filled.'<sup>4</sup>

To be unashamed to offer loaves of barley and to give what you have rather than to withhold hospitality is a much more commendable act. While he gave to the people in abundance, Eliseus left nothing for himself. Eliseus, therefore, was not

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 36.17,19.

ashamed to serve barley bread, whereas we find it shameful to have understanding of simple created things, which are called by their simple and customary names. When we read of 'heaven,' we should understand this to mean what it says. When we read of 'earth,' we should understand the fruit-bearing earth.

(7) What concern has the measurement of the circumference of the earth for me? Geometers estimate it to be 180 stadia. I gladly admit that I do not know that of which I am ignorant or, rather, that I am aware knowledge of this sort would not be of profit to me. Better than knowledge about the extent of the earth is knowledge about the concrete things in it. How can we grasp the dimensions of that which is surrounded by a sea, which is broken up by regions inhabited by barbarians, and by the many areas where the soil is marshy and impossible to traverse?

Scripture points out what is impossible for men, for God declares: 'Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and weighed the heavens with his palm and the bulk of the earth in his hand? Who hath weighed the mountains in scales and the rocks and the groves in a balance?' And further on: 'Who sitteth upon the globe of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as locusts, who stretcheth out the heavens as an arch?'<sup>5</sup> Who, then, ventures to put his knowledge in the same plane with that of God? Does man presume to offer that in the way of knowledge what God has sealed with his own oracular and majestic pronouncements?

(8) Surely, Moses was skilled in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. Yet he welcomed the Spirit of God. As His minister he preferred the way of truth to that vain and self-styled philosophical system. He laid down for us what he considered suited to our hopes, namely, that God made the earth, that the earth, produced plant life and all kinds of animal life

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<sup>5</sup> Isa. 40.12,22.

at the command of almighty God and by the operation of the Lord Jesus.

But he did not think that he should discuss how much atmospheric space is occupied by the shadow of the earth, when the sun recedes from us and takes away the light of day that illuminates the lower regions of the world. He did not discuss how the lunar orb is brought into eclipse in this part of the world, since in his account these phenomena were passed over as of no significance to us. Moses saw that there was no place in the words of the Holy Spirit for the vanity of this perishable knowledge which deceives and deludes us in our attempt to explain the unexplainable. He believed that only those things should be recorded which tend to our salvation.

### *Chapter 3*

(9) Let us keep close to the meaning of the prophetic words. Let us not hold in disdain as unworthy of our consideration the language of the Holy Spirit, who says: 'Let the earth bring forth alive cattle, beasts and crawling creatures.' What is the need of further argument, since it is evident that the natural origin of terrestrial creatures is in question? The Word of God permeates every creature in the constitution of the world. Hence, as God had ordained, all kinds of living creatures were quickly produced from the earth. In compliance with a fixed law they all succeed each other from age to age according to their aspect and kind. The lion generates a lion; the tiger, a tiger; the ox, an ox; the swan, a swan; and the eagle, an eagle. What was once enjoined became in nature a habit for all time. Hence the earth has not ceased to offer the homage of her service. The original species of living creatures is reproduced for future ages by successive generations of its kind.

(10) Do you wish to turn the creatures that have been generated to the profit of man? You will all the more accommodate creatures to man's pleasure if you will not deny to all creatures what is appropriate to their natures. In the first place, nature has designed that every species of cattle, beast, and fish has its belly extended, so that some crawl on their stomachs. You may observe that even those animals that need the support of legs are, by reason of their four-footed motion, part and parcel of the earth and thus lack freedom of action. They have, in fact, no ability to stand erect. They therefore seek their sustenance in the earth, solely pursuing the pleasures of the stomach toward which they incline.

Take care not to be bent over like cattle. See that you do not incline—not so much physically as they do, but morally. Have regard for the conformation of your body and assume in accordance with it the appearance of loftiness and strength. Leave to animals the sole privilege of feeding in a prone position. Why, contrary to your nature, do you bend over unduly in the act of eating? Why do you find delight in what is a violation of nature? Why do you feed on the things of the earth like cattle, intent on food both day and night? Why do you dishonor yourself by surrendering to the allurements of the body, a slave to the whims of appetite? Why do you deprive yourself of the intelligence with which the Creator has endowed you? Why do you put yourself on the level of the beasts? To dissociate yourself from these was the will of God, when He said: 'Do not become like the horse and the mule who have no understanding.'<sup>1</sup>

If the voracity and intemperance of the horse and his whinny of pleasure directed toward the mare give you delight, you should also find pleasure 'with bit and bridle to bind fast your jaws.'<sup>2</sup> If you revel in ferocity, the dominant trait of

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<sup>1</sup> Ps. 31.9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

savage beasts for which reason they are slain, see that you, too, may not become a victim of your own atrocious cruelty.

(11) The donkey is a slothful and stupid animal, an easy prey to all mischance. What is the lesson that this animal conveys? Is it not that we should become more alert and not grow dull from physical and mental inactivity? Why not, rather, take refuge in a faith which tends to lighten our heavy burdens?

(12) The wily fox hides away in pits and caves. Is not this proof that the animal has no purpose? Because of his habit of plundering he deserves our hatred and warrants our aversion for his total lack of caution while laying snares for his victims.

(13) The partridge is cunning in that she steals the eggs of another partridge and fosters them with her own body. But she is unable to profit from this, because she loses the brood as soon as she has hatched it. When these hear the voice of the partridge who has laid the eggs, they leave their adopted nest and, following a natural instinct, go to her whom they recognize as their true and natural mother. In this way they indicate that the function of a nurse is totally different from that of a mother. Thus, she performs her own proper labors in vain and pays the penalty of her own deceit. Hence Jeremias says: 'The partridge uttered a cry and gathered what she did not lay,'<sup>3</sup> that is, she gathered the eggs and gave forth a cry as if rejoicing at the effect of her own deceit. But she spends her labor in vain. Her prolonged period of brooding benefits another and not herself.

The Devil imitates this bird in his endeavor to lay claim to the generations of the eternal Creator. If he succeeds in bringing together a group lacking in wisdom and devoid of sound sense, he allures them with corporeal enticements. As soon as the voice of Christ reaches the hearts of the little

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<sup>3</sup> Jer. 17.11.



ones, they depart and take themselves to their mother, who embraces her young with an endearing mother's love.<sup>4</sup> The Devil did not create the Gentiles, but he gathered them in. When Christ in His Gospel sent forth His message, they eagerly fled so as to be under the protection of the shadow of His wings. He consigned them to the fostering care of Mother Church.<sup>5</sup>

(14) The lion, proud in the fierceness of his nature, will not brook mingling with other wild animals. Like a king, he disdains association with them. He scorns the food of the previous day. He turns away even from the fragmentary remains of his meal. What wild beast would venture to associate with him whose roar of itself inspires such terror that many animals who could outrun him will quail on hearing it, as if struck dumb by some strange force.

(15) Scripture is also not silent about the nature of the leopard. By the varied character of his coat he betrays the variety of his emotions. Jeremias says: 'If the Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard his spots.'<sup>6</sup> This is not said merely of what is external. It refers, also, to changes in the fierce nature of the animal. The Jewish people, whose characters were spoiled because of the gloomy and uneasy fluctuations of their hearts and minds, could not attain the grace of good purpose. Once they had acquired the fierce character of a wild beast, they were unable to return to a better and improved mode of life.

### *Chapter 4*

(16) There is in the nature of quadrupeds something which the language of the prophetic books exhorts us to imitate.

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4 Cf. Matt. 23.37.

5 Cf. Ps. 16.8.

6 Jer. 13.23.



We should follow their example and avoid slothfulness. Neither because of size nor bodily weakness should we desist from our eagerness to carry into effect the lofty aims of a virtuous life.

The ant is a tiny animal, yet she ventures to achieve things beyond her strength. She is not driven to labor as a slave is. Rather, without compulsion and with freedom of foresight, she lays up provision for a future day. Scripture admonishes us to imitate the industry of the ant: 'Go to the ant, thou sluggard, and consider her ways and be wiser than she.'<sup>1</sup> She has no land under cultivation. Yet, without a taskmaster to urge her on as she looks after her stock of food, what a harvest has she in store for herself—a harvest gathered from the results of your labors! While you may frequently be in need, she wants for nothing. There are no granaries closed to the ant, no guards impassable, no stores of grain untouchable! The guard sees and dares not prohibit the theft. The owner gazes on his loss and exacts no punishment! Over the plain moves the dark column. The paths are aglow with the concourse of voyagers and particles of grain which cannot be seized by their narrow jaws are heaved along by their shoulders!<sup>2</sup> The owner of the crop beholds all this and blushes to refuse such trifles to co-operative industry such as this!

(17) What shall I say about dogs who have a natural instinct to show gratitude and to serve as watchful guardians of their masters' safety? Hence Scripture cries out to the ungrateful, the slothful, and the craven: 'Dumb dogs, not able to bark.'<sup>3</sup> To dogs, therefore, is given the ability to bark in defense of their masters and their homes. Thus you should learn to use your voice for the sake of Christ, when ravening wolves attack His sheepfold. Have the word ready on your lips, lest, like a silent watch-dog, you may appear because of

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<sup>1</sup> Prov. 6.6.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 4.402-407.

<sup>3</sup> Isa. 56.10.

your unfaithfulness to abandon the post entrusted to you. Such a dog was the friend and companion of an angel. Not without reason did Raphael in the prophetic book cause this dog to accompany the son of Tobias when he went on a journey, in order to drive out Asmodeus and thereby confirm the marriage. The demon is driven out as the result of a grateful recognition and the union is stabilized.<sup>4</sup>

And so, under the symbolism of a dumb animal, the angel Raphael, as director of the young man Tobias whom he had agreed to protect, was able to arouse sentiments of gratitude in him. Who would not feel shame if he did not return thanks to those who are well deserving of it, when he sees that even beasts shun the sin of ingratitude? These animals hold in grateful memory the sustenance they have acquired. Are you not mindful of the salvation you have received?

(18) Although 'a bear lies in wait,' as Scripture says<sup>5</sup>—for she is a wild beast full of deceit—when she finds her young at the moment of birth to be formless, she immediately proceeds to lick them with her tongue until they become like her in form and shape. Do you not marvel that a wild animal should show such devotion with her tongue, an animal whose inherent nature is manifested by love for her young? The bear, therefore, forms her young into the likeness of herself. Are you not competent to train your sons, so that they, too, may become like yourselves?

(19) What shall we say about the bear and the art of medicine? She knows, in fact, how to heal herself when suffering from the effects of a serious wound. She lies under a plant called by the Greeks '*flomus*'<sup>6</sup> and touches it with her open sores, which are thereby healed.

Serpents, too, are able to rid themselves of blindness by

4 Cf. Tob. 6.1; 3.8; 8.3; 11.8.

5 Lam. 3.10.

6 Mullein.

eating the fennel plant. Accordingly, when they feel their eyesight becoming weaker, they search for their familiar remedy and are not disappointed in its results.

When tortoises, after eating the entrails of a serpent, feel the poison circulating through their bodies, they have recourse to a plant called marjoram in an effort to find a cure. Even when they lie concealed in their lairs in the marshes, they instinctively seek for a curative antidote. By this assured cure they attest that they know the efficacy of plants. You may observe that foxes, too, heal themselves with resin from a pine tree. By making use of such a remedy they postpone the time of imminent death.

(20) The Lord gave utterance to these words in the book of Jeremias: 'The turtle and the swallow and the sparrows of the field observed the time of their coming, but my people have not known the judgments of the Lord.'<sup>7</sup> Swallows know the time of their coming and of their return. These dutiful birds know how to announce the signs of spring by the testimony of their arrival.

Ants also keep watch for the coming of sunny weather. When they notice that their store of food remains soggy because of rain storms, a careful exploration is made of atmospheric conditions to determine when a series of warm days should arrive. Then they release the food supply, which is carried out of their hiding places to be dried by prolonged exposure to the sun. For that reason you will never experience stormy weather during that whole period of time, except when it should, in the interval, happen that the ants have changed their minds and decided to restore their supply of food to their granaries.

Sheep, at the approach of winter, browse on grass with an appetite that is insatiable. They have a presentiment of the coming of inclement weather. For this reason they proceed to

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<sup>7</sup> Jer. 8.9.

fill themselves to satiety before vegetation dies from the effects of bitter frost.

Hedgehogs, commonly called *iricei*, on sensing the approach of danger, 'gather themselves behind their shields'<sup>8</sup> so that anyone who has in mind to harm them may be wounded by their prickly armor. In anticipation of eventualities, these animals are provided with two organs of respiration. For example, then they sense the coming of northerly winds, they close the aperture open to the north. When they note that 'the clouds have been cleared away by the south wind,'<sup>9</sup> they turn toward the north so as to avoid the harmful breezes coming from the opposite direction.

(21) Hence, the Prophet rendered praise worthy of the Lord when he said: 'How great are thy works, O Lord. Thou hast made all things in wisdom.'<sup>10</sup> The divine wisdom penetrates and fills all things. Far more conviction is gained from the observation of irrational creatures than from the arguments of rational beings. Of more value is the testimony given by nature than is the proof presented by doctrine. What animal does not know how to look after his own safety — by offering resistance where force is necessary, by flight or by watchfulness where speed or cunning is called for? Who has instructed them on the curative powers of herbs? Human beings are often deceived by the appearance of herbs. Frequently, we discover those to be noxious which we had considered to be salutary. How often has death crept into repasts that were delicious! How frequently has death-dealing food penetrated even past the watchers and servants of the palace halls to bring death to kings! Wild beasts, merely by the sense of smell, are able to discern what is beneficial and what is harmful. They feed on the plant without the intervention

<sup>8</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* 10.412.

<sup>9</sup> Horace, *Odes* 1.7.15,16.

<sup>10</sup> Ps. 103.24.

of lackeys or food-tasters and receive no harm! Nature is a better guide and teacher of what is actual and true. She inspires into our senses the perception of what is sweet and health-giving and needs no director. She, too, instructs us how to avoid the bitterness of that which brings ultimate pain. The sweetness of life is set against the harshness of death.

Nature entrusts to the lioness the care of her whelps. Maternal affection makes gentle the savagery of the beast. Nature checks for the moment the ferocity of the tigress and turns her aside as she is on the point of seizing her prey. The minute she discovers that her young have been taken, she sets out on the track of the despoiler. Although he may have the advantage of a fast horse, he is aware that he may be outdone in speed by the wild beast. In a situation where there is available no means of escape he has to resort to the following stratagem. When he perceives that he is being overtaken, he lets fall a glass ball. The lioness is deceived by her reflection, thinking that she sees there her young. After being retarded by the deceitful image, she once more expends all her strength in her effort to seize the horseman. Spurred on by rage, she comes closer and closer to her fleeing victim. Again he throws out the glass ball, thus slowing down his pursuer. Yet her remembrance of past deceits does not prevent her from complying with her maternal instincts. She keeps turning over the reflected image that deludes her and settles down on it as if to nurse her young. Thus, deceived by her own maternal solicitude, she suffers at once the forfeiture of her vengeance and the loss of her offspring.<sup>11</sup>

(22) We have here the message of the Scriptures which declares: 'Children, love your fathers; parents, do not provoke your children to anger.'<sup>12</sup> Nature has implanted in beasts the instinct to love their own brood and hold dear their own

11 Cf. Claudian, *De raptu Proserpinae* 3.263ff.

12 Col. 2.20,21.



progeny. They know nothing of relations-in-law. Here, parents do not become estranged from their offspring by the act of changing their consorts. They know nothing of preferences given to children of a later union to the neglect of those of a former marriage. They are conscious of the value of their pledges and are unacquainted with distinctions in respect to love, to incentives due to hate, and to discriminations in acts that involve wrong-doing. Wild creatures have a nature that is simple and one which has no concern in the perversion of truth. And so the Lord has ordained that those creatures to whom He has bestowed a minimum of reason are endowed with the maximum of feeling.

What wild animal would not willingly face death in defense of her young? What wild beast, although exposed to countless armed men advancing 'in wedge formation,'<sup>13</sup> would not protect with her own life's blood her own progeny? With her body she sets up a wall of stout defense around her little ones, so that they are immune from peril in the midst of 'a harvest of spears'?<sup>14</sup> What has man to offer—he who pays no heed to what is enjoined on him and is oblivious to the dictates of nature? A son despises his father; a father disinherits his son. An occasion when a man's own progeny is condemned to death is regarded as an act of justice. A father actually passes judgment on himself by treating his own child as something without real substance. An act in which nature is punished with sterility is considered to have the sanction of authority.

(23) That dogs are devoid of reason is beyond all doubt. Nevertheless, if you consider the keenness of their senses, you can well believe that their sagacity of sense perception has taken on the trappings of reason. Hence, one can easily perceive that they are able to understand, by the training given

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13 Virgil, *Aeneid* 12.575.

14 *Ibid.* 3.46.



by nature, what it has taken a few individuals a long period of time to achieve with the aid of the refinements of syllogistic argumentation acquired in the advanced schools of rhetoric. When they discover the tracks of a hare or of a stag at a point where there is a side path or a crossroad leading in several directions, they proceed to make note of the starting point of each of these trails. In silence, they weigh the problems one with the other. By applying their keenness of scent they seem to make the following observation: 'Our quarry has gone either in this direction or in that,' they say, 'or surely he has fled into this clearing. Yet he has not taken this route or that. One direction remains. There is no reason, therefore, to doubt that he has taken this route.' What men, with the aid of prolonged discussion and meditation, achieve with difficulty nature readily supplies to dogs, who weigh first the false hypothesis and when that is repudiated finally discover what is true.

Is it not true that philosophers spend whole days setting forth problems on sand, 'tracing with a rod'<sup>15</sup> each proposition one by one? Since it must be that of three propositions only one is true, these men first eliminate two of these as not in conformity with truth. And so they conclude that the essence of truth is found in the proposition that remains.

Who is as mindful of benefits and as grateful for kindness as the dog? For their masters' sake they go so far as to leap on robbers and to keep off strangers prowling at night. They are prepared, too, to die in defense of their masters and even to die with them! Dogs have often been the means of convicting people accused of homicide by showing clear evidence of the crime committed. Reliance is made in many cases on their testimony.

(24) It is related that in the early morning in a remote part of the city of Antioch a man who had a dog as a com-

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 6.850.

panion was found slain. The killer was a certain soldier bent on robbery. In the dusk of the morning hours he was able to find refuge in another region. The body lay unburied and attracted a crowd of bystanders. The dog bewailed with mournful cries the loss of his master. It happened that the man who committed the murder, in order to assure his innocence and make himself secure by his presence—such is human astuteness—joined the circle of people and with the air of displaying sympathy approached the corpse. At that moment the dog relinquished his whine of distress and assumed the role of avenger. He attacked him and held him prisoner. Raising a pitiful cry after the manner of an epilogue in a speech, the dog brought tears in the eyes of everyone present and inspired trust in his testimony. This man alone of all the men present was seized and held fast. The man thereupon became alarmed. He was unable any longer to deny his guilt. Such a clear indication of his offense could not be made void by pleas of hate, enmity, ill-will, or of injury inflicted. Since he had not succeeded in his master's defense, the dog in this case undertook a more difficult role, that of avenging him.

What meritorious act do we do for our Creator, on whose bounty we live? We close our eyes to insults against God Himself. Often, too, we set before the enemies of God food which we have received from His very hands.

(25) What animal is more innocent than the lamb? We are accustomed to make an analogy between lambs and our own little children. It often happens that in a large flock a lamb decides to wander over the whole sheepfold, roaming in search of his mother. When she on her part is unable to find her lamb, she attempts to discover his whereabouts by bleating frequently. By this means she hopes to cause him to give an answering cry whereby he could direct back 'his truant footsteps.'<sup>16</sup> Although he has wound his way among thousands of

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16 Virgil, *Eclogues* 6.58.

sheep, he still recognizes the voice of his parent. He hastens to his mother and finds his way to the familiar sources of his mother's milk. Notwithstanding the lamb's eager desire for milk, he passes by other udders heavy with milk. These udders, in fact, may overflow with milk, yet he persists in searching for his mother. The depleted store of his mother's udders means just full abundance. She, too, can distinguish her offspring among the many thousands of lambs. In outward appearance they are the same. One can find no differences in the sound of their bleating. The mother picks out her own progeny from the rest of the flock. She recognizes her brood by the sole testimony of parental love. Whereas the shepherd may err in making his selection, the lamb cannot make a mistake in recognizing his mother. The shepherd is deceived by appearances, but a sheep is guided by natural affection. To all appearances, each one has the same odor, yet nature provides for them the power of distinguishing a scent which their own progeny, by I know not what peculiar potency, alone gives forth.

(26) Nature has her own customs and her own innate instincts. Scarcely has the infant got his first teeth when he is able to test his own arms. The puppy does not yet have his teeth, yet in defense he acts as if he had. The deer is not yet provided with horns, yet he practices and butts with his head, threatening with weapons with which he is not furnished. A wolf takes away a man's power of speech by first staring at him. The wolf despises this man over whom he is victorious by reason of his loss of speech. On the other hand, if a wolf perceives that he has been seen first, he loses his fierce character and is unable to run away. A lion is in dread of a cock, especially of one white in color. A she-goat when wounded searches for a plant called *dittany* and by this means rids herself of arrows. Wild animals, too, have instinctive knowledge of suitable remedies. A sick lion searches for an ape which,

when devoured, restores him to health. To a leopard the blood of a wild she-goat serves as an antidote against physical weakness. A sick bear devours ants. A deer chews the branches of an olive tree.<sup>17</sup>

(27) Wild animals know, therefore, what is beneficial to them, whereas you, man, have no knowledge of your remedies. You do not know how to snatch power away from your adversary, so that he, like a wolf taken by surprise, is unable to escape. You are unable by the eye of your mind to outwit his treacherous designs, to obstruct his flow of speech, and dull the edge of his impudent display of rhetoric. If he comes on you by surprise, he will deprive you of your power of speech. If dumbness comes upon you, loosen your foot-gear in order to loosen your tongue. If a wolf should attack you, pick up a rock—and he turns in flight! Christ is your rock. If you find refuge with Christ, the wolf will take flight and not terrify you. This is the rock which Peter, when he hesitated on the water, sought for and found, because he held on to the right hand of Christ.<sup>18</sup>

(28) Why do I need to mention the fact that men are fond of garlic and use as a food a substance which the leopard avoids? Hence, as soon as a person gets ready to prepare garlic, a leopard, who is unable to tolerate it, is apt to leap forth from that region. To think that you use for food and infuse into your vitals a substance<sup>19</sup> whose very odor a ferocious wild beast cannot endure! But it serves as medicine for those in pain. Let it be used as medicine, then, for invalids and not as food for banqueters. You have in mind to procure a drug, but you shun fasting as a restorative, as if you could find another remedy as efficacious as that! A serpent suffers death after tasting the sputum of a man who is fasting. You see,

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<sup>17</sup> Much of this lore is found in Pliny, *Historia naturalis* 8 and 10.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Matt. 14.30,31.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Horace, *Epodes* 3.5.

then, what potency there is in fasting, when a man can kill a serpent with his own sputum. If this is true of an earthly being, how much more true is it of the realm of spirit!

(29) How great is the wisdom which the Lord has infused even into little creatures! The turtle-dove covers her nest with onion sprouts to prevent wolves from attacking her fledglings. She knows that wolves usually shun these sprouts. The fox knows how to protect her own young, whereas you are ignorant of the means to do so. Why are you heedless in not making provision against the onslaughts of the iniquitous wolves of the spirit by providing greater security for the life which will follow this?

### *Chapter 5*

(30) But let us return to the creation of different species and reflect on the reason why the Lord formed some beasts, such as lions, tigers, and bears, with shorter necks, whereas other animals, such as elephants and camels, were created with longer necks. Do we not find clear reason for this in the fact that animals which are carnivorous do not need long necks? They bend down their necks and jaws to the earth in the act of feeding. They use them for waylaying a deer or for dismembering an ox or a sheep. On the other hand, the camel, a taller animal, would be unable to feed on the smallest plants unless in the process of feeding he was able to extend his long neck to the ground. Accordingly, to the camel there has been allotted a neck that is longer in proportion to his stature. This is true, also, in the case of such herbivorous animals as the horse and the ox.

(31) The elephant, too, has a prominent trunk; otherwise he would be unable, because of his surpassing size, to reach the ground in order to find pasturage. He therefore makes use of this trunk in his search for food. Through it this monstrous



beast imbibes huge quantities of water. This trunk is hollow and capacious. In the effort to satisfy his thirst this huge beast empties entire troughs. Thus he inundates himself within with rivers of water. In fact, his neck is smaller than the massive size of his body demands, so that it may serve a useful function and not be an encumbrance.<sup>1</sup> For the same reason the animal does not bend his knees. In order that such a mighty contrivance be held in balance, there is need that his legs be like columns of a more than ordinary rigid character. The extremities of his feet are slightly curved, but the remaining parts of his legs are rigid throughout from top to bottom. Such a huge beast cannot bend his knees as we do. Naturally, therefore, he does not share with the rest of animals the ability to bend over or lie down. In order that without danger to himself he may sway a little in his sleep, he is supported on both sides by what may be called huge beams, inasmuch as he has no articulated joints in his limbs. For elephants that are tame a type of support has been contrived by men who are expert in this work. For the wild and untamed there is certainly an element of danger in the fact that no provision has been made for such supports.

(32) Elephants actually make use of trees either for scratching their sides or for relaxation in sleep. These trees are sometimes bent or broken by the weight of such a body, which causes the animals to fall headlong. Being unable to raise himself up, he lies there and dies. He may be discovered by his cries of pain, as he exposes the softer parts of his body to wounds and death. Weapons cannot easily penetrate his back and the other harder parts of his body. Hunters in search for ivory prepare the following scheme to trap these animals. From the trees which the elephant makes use of they cut away a small section on the sides opposite those which generally

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1 Cf. Sallust, *Bellum Jug.* 14.4



served his purpose. The trees subjected to this pressure cannot sustain the weight of the elephant's limbs and become the immediate cause of his downfall.

(33) To find fault with these facts is like finding fault with the height of buildings which often threaten to fall headlong and are with difficulty restored. But if we frequently raise these aloft for the sake of artistic beauty or to serve as watch-towers, we ought to approve of this, too, in the case of elephants, because they perform a useful service in time of war. The Persians, for example, a race of fierce warriors, are noted for their expertness in archery and in similar arts. They advance in battle array surrounded by what appear to be moving towers, from which they shoot their weapons. When shot from a higher position these do more execution against the enemy below. In the center of the battlefield the combat seems to be concentrated around a rampart, citadel, or watch-tower, where the entrenched warriors appear to be spectators of the war rather than participants in it. They seem to be so remote from danger behind the protective bastion of the beasts. Who would venture to approach them, when he could be hit by a weapon from above or be annihilated by the onrush of the elephants from below? As a result, the battle line with its battalions drawn up in wedge formation gives way before them. The camping grounds which were laid out in blocks of squares have completely vanished. The elephants attack the enemy with a force that is irresistible. They cannot be held back by any embattled array of soldiers with massed shields. They take on the appearance of mountains moving in the midst of the battle. Conspicuous with their high crests and emitting a loud trumpet sound, they inspire fear in everyone.

What avail are feet or strength of muscles or manual dexterity to those who have to face a moving battlement packed with armed men? What use is his steed to the horse-

man? Driven by fear at the hugeness of this beast, his horse flees in panic! What can the bowman do against such an onslaught, although the armored soldier may not be affected by a rain of arrows directed from above? Moreover, the beasts' hides, even when unprotected, are not easily penetrated by a weapon. Protected by this armor, they cut their way through and overwhelm the opposing masses of men without any risk of danger to themselves.

(34) As in the case of huge buildings, we see that elephants, too, are supported by foundations of unusual strength. Otherwise, they would totter in a brief space of time because of lack of comparable sustaining power in their extremities. We are told nowadays that elephants live 300 years or more—a fact that corresponds to the hugeness of their bodies. And so their limbs are all the more sturdy because they are compact, not disjointed as ours are. How frequently it happens that our knees and feet cause us suffering, if we have been standing a long time or have been running at too high speed or after prolonged walking. Limbs that are jointed and articulated are more subject to pain than those which are compact and solid.

(35) And no wonder that elephants, when equipped with arms, are an object of fear. Actually, they always present an armored front, with their tusks acting as a natural spear! Whatever they take hold of they break into pieces with their trunks and whatever they trample on they annihilate—such is the force of their onrush! To provide themselves with food they take possession of whole groves. Like huge dragons they involve with their serpentine folds whatever they waylay. Often, their trunks take on a circular form when in the act of eating or drinking. We have here a proof that nothing created is superfluous. Yet this huge beast is subject to us and complies with our commands.

*Chapter 6*

(36) Inasmuch as we propose to discuss the nature of man, it is fitting that, by way of preface, something be said that reflects credit on him.

There appears to be no creature which has more physical strength or by its size inspires more terror than an elephant. No animals are as fierce as the lion and the tiger. Yet these beasts serve the interests of man and as the result of man's training lay aside their natural instincts. They forget their innate propensities and assume those which are imposed on them by command. Why need I say more? They are taught as if they were children. They cringe like weaklings and are lashed like timid creatures. They are corrected as are those subject to us and assume our habits since they have lost their own peculiar impulses.

(37) Wonderful, therefore, is the work of nature in both great and little things, for 'wonderful is the Lord on high.'<sup>1</sup> Just as we admire the level plains no less than we do the high mountains, so we marvel no more at the height of the cedar than we do at the fruitfulness of the vine or of the modest olive tree. In like manner, I admire the elephant for his hugeness no less than the mouse for the fact that he inspires the same elephant with terror.

Nature, therefore, has the power of causing fear in certain aspects and of being fearful in others. Each and every creature is endowed with certain characteristics which are their special mainstay. The elephant is a formidable object to a bull, but is fearful of a mouse. The lion, king of beasts, is disturbed by the slight sting of a scorpion and dies from the bite of poisonous serpent. The lion has extraordinary beauty as he shakes his mighty mane and raises his head on high. Yet, who does not marvel at the fact that huge bodies are subject to

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<sup>1</sup> Ps. 42.4.

death from a scorpion's slight sting—so slight as to be without substance?

(38) Let no one impugn the work of the Creator of serpents. He has, in fact, exposed His creatures to all other kinds of poisons, either animal or vegetable. These have come into being for our correction, not for our destruction. As a matter of fact, that which is an object of terror either to the cowardly, the weak, or the godless is a source of usefulness for others. A tutor, for example, seems severe, harsh, and unyielding toward his charges. He is unsparing with the whip, tames their boisterousness, and exacts their obedience. He surrounds them with fear, so that he may curb their boyish spirits. As a result of this severe treatment they turn out to be virtuous, temperate, and restrained, more eager for commendation than for sport. Do you not see how these fear-inspiring whippings are able to serve a good purpose?

Thus, serpents act as scourges for those whose pronounced character is immature and infantile, whereas no harm can come to the robust. The following words were meant for him who trusted in the Lord: 'You shall tread upon the asp and the viper; you shall trample down the lion and the dragon.'<sup>2</sup> Paul was bitten by a viper. It was believed that he, being a sinful man scarce rescued from shipwreck, would soon die of poison. Because he shook off the viper from the fire and still suffered no harm, the onlookers regarded him with more veneration.<sup>3</sup> Addressing all men, the Lord says:<sup>4</sup> 'He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned.' And He said these signs shall attend those who believe: they shall fondle serpents, yet cannot suffer harm from these nor from the drinking of any deadly thing. A man's lack of faith is more to be feared

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<sup>2</sup> Ps. 90.13.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Acts 28.3-6.

<sup>4</sup> Mark 16.16; cf. 17,18.

than poisonous serpents. Have fear of these, therefore, so that the occasion of your dread may at least lead you to faith. But, if you have no fear of God, then beware of the avenging poison of perfidy.

(39) Now, since you behold both lions and elephants subject to you, recall to mind, man, that the saying 'know thyself' is not something emanating from Pythian Apollo, but from Solomon, who says: 'If thou know not thyself, fairest among women.' Furthermore, long before this time Moses wrote in Deuteronomy: 'Keep thyself.'<sup>5</sup> The Law says: 'Man, keep thyself.' And the Prophet says: 'If you know not thyself.' To whom does he say these words? He adds: 'Fairest among women.'

What constitutes the beautiful among women if not the soul, an outstanding attribute in both sexes? Not without reason is the soul comely, since it longs, not for the things of earth, but for those of heaven; not for the corruptible, but for the incorruptible, the beauty of which is not liable to perish. All corporeal things, on the other hand, suffer decay either in the march of time or because of the inroads of disease. 'Keep thyself,' says Moses, in that in which you form a totality—that in which the better part of you consists. Hence, the Lord explained your nature when He said: 'Beware of false prophets,'<sup>6</sup> for they cause your soul to weaken and your mind to totter. Thus, you are not flesh alone. What is flesh without the guidance of the soul and the vigor of the mind? We put on the garment of flesh today and tomorrow it is laid aside. The flesh is temporal, whereas the soul is lasting. Like a garment for the body, such is flesh for the soul. You are not, therefore, a garment, but one who puts on a garment for use. And so you are told to 'strip off the old man with

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<sup>5</sup> Cant. 1.7; Deut. 4.9.

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 7.15.

his deeds and put on the new'<sup>7</sup>—you who are renewed not in the quality of the body, but in the spirit and affirmation of the mind.

Flesh you are not, I repeat. It is not said of the flesh: 'For holy is the temple of God and this temple you are.' And elsewhere: 'You are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you,'<sup>8</sup> that is to say, in those who have had a new birth and in the faithful in whom the Spirit of God dwells. It does not dwell among the carnal, for it is written: 'My spirit shall not remain in these men forever, because they are flesh.'<sup>9</sup>

### *Chapter 7*

(40) But let us consider the precise order of our creation: 'Let us make mankind,' He said, 'in our image and likeness.'<sup>1</sup>

Who says this? Was it not God who made you? What is God: flesh or spirit? Surely not flesh, but spirit, which has no similarity to flesh. This is material, whereas the spirit is incorporeal and invisible.

To whom does He speak? Surely not to Himself, because He does not say: 'I shall make,' but 'let us make.' He does not speak to the angels, because they are servers, and servants cannot have a part in a work along with their Master and Creator. He speaks, rather, to the Son, although the Jews are unwilling to accept this and the Arians object to it. But let the Jews preserve silence and let the Arians with their progenitors be mute, who, while they exclude One from sharing in the divine work, introduce more participants and grant to underlings a privilege which they deny to the Son.

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7 Col. 3.9,10.

8 1 Cor. 3.17,16.

9 Gen. 6.3.

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1 Gen. 1.26.



(41) But suppose that God appears to you to have need of the assistance of servants in His work. If God operates in conjunction with the angels, have God and the angels a common 'image'? Would He say to the angels: 'Let us make mankind in our image and likeness'? Listen to the Apostle who tells us who is the image of God: 'Who has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His majesty in whom we have our redemption and the redemption of our sins, who is the image of the invisible God and the first-born of every creature.'<sup>2</sup> He is the 'image' of His Father who always is and was from the beginning. Hence it is the 'image' who says: 'Philip, he who sees me sees also the Father.' And again, although you behold the living 'image' of the living Father: 'How canst thou say, show us the Father? Dost thou not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?'<sup>3</sup>

The 'image' of God is virtue, not infirmity. The 'image' of God is wisdom. The 'image' of God is He alone who has said: 'I and the Father are one,'<sup>4</sup> thus possessing the likeness of the Father so as to have a unity of divinity and of plenitude.

When He says 'let us make,' how can there be inequality? When, again, He says 'to our likeness,' where is the dissimilitude? So, when He says in the Gospel: 'I and the Father.' there is no reference to one sole person. But when He says: 'We are one,' there is no distinction either in divinity or in operation. Both, therefore, do not have one person, but one substance. Well did He add: 'We are,' because the divine essence is eternal. So, then, He whom you would consider unlike the Father is co-eternal with Him! He is eternal of whom Moses spoke: 'I AM WHO AM.'<sup>5</sup> Fittingly, too, there preceded

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<sup>2</sup> Col. 1.13-15.

<sup>3</sup> John 14.8-10.

<sup>4</sup> John 10.30.

<sup>5</sup> Exod. 3.14.

the words: 'I and the Father.'<sup>6</sup> If He had mentioned the Father first, you would consider the Son to be lesser. But He mentioned the Son first, then—as it is not fitting that the Son be above the Father—He added the Father, so that you may note that between the Father and Son there is no precedence of rank.

(42) 'Attend to thyself alone,'<sup>7</sup> says Scripture. In fact, we must distinguish between 'ourselves,' 'ours,' and 'what surrounds us.' 'Ourselves' refers to body and soul. 'Ours' are the members of our bodies and our senses. 'What surrounds us' consists of our money, our slaves, and all that belongs to this life. 'Attend to thyself,' therefore, 'know thyself,' that is to say—not what muscular arms you have, not how strong you are physically, or how many possessions or power you have. Attend, rather, to your soul and mind, whence all our deliberations emanate and to which the profit of your works is referred. Here only is the fullness of wisdom, the plenitude of piety and justice of which God speaks—for all virtue comes from God: 'Behold, Jerusalem, I have painted thy walls.'<sup>8</sup> That soul of yours is painted by God, who holds in Himself the flashing beauty of virtue and the splendor of piety. That soul is well painted in which shines the imprint of divine operation. That soul is well painted in which resides the splendor of grace and the reflection of its paternal nature. Precious is that picture which in its brilliance is in accord with that divine reflection.

Adam before he sinned conformed to this image. But after his fall he lost that celestial image and took on one that is terrestrial. Let us flee from this image which cannot enter the city of God, for it is written: 'In thy city, O Lord, thou shall

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<sup>6</sup> John 10.30.

<sup>7</sup> Deut. 4.9.

<sup>8</sup> Isa. 49.16.

<sup>9</sup> Ps. 72.20.

bring their image to nothing.<sup>9</sup> An unworthy image does not enter there; no sooner does it enter than it is excluded, because we read: 'There shall not enter into it anything common nor he who practices abomination and falsehood.'<sup>10</sup> He in whose forehead is written the name of the Lamb will find entrance there.

(43) Our soul, therefore, is made to the image of God. In this is man's entire essence, because without it man is nothing but earth and into earth he shall return.<sup>11</sup> Hence, in order to convince you that without the soul the flesh is nothing, Scripture says: 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.'<sup>12</sup>

Why, then, do you presume in the flesh, you who lose nothing when you lose the flesh? Rather, be fearful lest you be deprived of the aid of your soul. 'What will a man give in exchange for his own soul?'<sup>13</sup> In this is no slight part of himself—in fact, it is the substantial part of the entire human race. This is the means by which men lord it over other living things, wild beasts, and birds. Your soul is made to the image of God, whereas your body is related to the beasts. In one there is the holy seal of imitation of the divine. In the other there is found base association with beasts and wild animals.

### *Chapter 8*

(44) But let us define more accurately the meaning of the phrase, 'to the image of God.' Is it true that the flesh is made 'to the image of God'? In that case, is there earth in God, since flesh is of earth? Is God corporeal, that is to say, weak and subject like the flesh to the passions? Perhaps the

<sup>10</sup> Apoc. 21.27.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Gen. 3.19.

<sup>12</sup> Matt. 10.28.

<sup>13</sup> Matt. 16.26.

head may seem to you to be made in the likeness of God because it stands aloft, or the eyes because they observe, or the ears because they hear? As to the question of height, are we to consider ourselves to be tall just because we tower a little over the earth? Are we not ashamed to be thought of as like to God merely because we are taller than serpents or other creeping creatures or even than deer, sheep, or wolves? In that respect, how much taller are elephants and camels in comparison with us! Sight is important to us in order to enable us to behold the things of the world and to have knowledge of what is not reported by any person, but is grasped by our sense of sight. How significant, in fact, is this power of sight! Because of it we may be said to have the likeness of God, who sees all, observes all, comprehends our hidden emotions, and searches into the secrets of our hearts!<sup>1</sup>

Am I not ashamed to admit that it is not in my power to see parts of my body? What is in front of me I can see, but I am unable to see what is behind me. I have no view of my neck or of the back of my head and I cannot see my loins. In like manner, what avail is our sense of hearing if we cannot either see or hear what is only a short distance away? If walls should intervene, both sight and hearing are impeded. Furthermore, our bodies are fixed and enclosed in a narrow space, whereas all wild animals have a wider range and are also swifter than men.

(45) The flesh, therefore, cannot be made to the image of God. This is true, however, of our souls, which are free to wander far and wide in acts of reflection and of counsel. Our souls are able to envisage and reflect on all things. We who are now in Italy have in mind what seems to pertain to affairs in the East or in the West. We seem to have dealings with men who dwell in Persia. We envision those who have their homes in Africa, if there happen to be acquaintances of

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1 Cf. Rom. 8.27; 1 Cor. 14.25.

ours who enjoy the hospitality of that land. We accompany these people on their departure and draw near to them in their voyage abroad. We are one with them in their absence. Those who are separated far from us engage us in conversation. We arouse the dead even to mutual interchange of thoughts and embrace them as if they were still living. We even go to the point of conferring on these people the usages and customs of our daily life.

That, therefore, is made to the image of God which is perceived, not by the power of the body, but by that of the mind. It is that power which beholds the absent and embraces in its vision countries beyond the horizon. Its vision crosses boundaries and gazes intently on what is hidden.<sup>2</sup> In one moment the utmost bounds of the world and its remote secret places are under its ken. God is attained and Christ is approached. There is a descent into hell, and aloft in the sky there is an ascent into heaven. Hear, then, what Scripture says: 'But our citizenship is in heaven.'<sup>3</sup> Is not that, therefore, in which God is ever-present made to the likeness of God? Listen to what the Apostle says in that regard: 'We all, therefore, with faces unveiled, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of God, are being transformed into his very image from glory to glory, as through the Spirit of the Lord.'<sup>4</sup>

(46) Now that we are convinced that the soul is made to the likeness of God, let us take up the question as to whether the statement 'let us make man' can be said of the soul. Give ear to the words of Scripture, where in Genesis the word 'soul' is used for man: 'And the sons of Joseph that were born to him in the land of Egypt, two souls. All the souls of the house of Jacob that entered into Egypt were seventy.'<sup>5</sup>

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2 Cf. Sallust, *Bellum Jug.* 12.5.

3 Phil. 3.20.

4 2 Cor. 3.18.

5 Gen. 46.27.

Appropriately enough, the soul is called *homo* in Latin and ἄνθρωπος in Greek, the former being derived from 'humanity' and the latter from a word associated with the lively faculty of 'seeing,'<sup>6</sup> a faculty which has more kinship with the soul than with the body. This agrees well with what is said in the Lamentations of Jeremias: 'The Lord is good to them that support him, to the soul that seeketh him.'<sup>7</sup> He made reference to men and thought it necessary to add 'soul.' God preferably seeks after the soul when it is alone, thus dissociating Himself from the slime of the body and from the cupidity of the flesh.

The soul, then, is made to the image of God, in form like the Lord Jesus. Those men are saints who are conformed to the Son of God. So we read in the Apostle Paul: 'Now we know that for those who love God all things work together unto good, for those who, according to His purpose, are saints through his call. For those whom he has foreknown he has also predestined to become conformed to the image of his Son, that he should be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he has predestined, them has he also called and those whom he has called, them he has also justified, and those whom he has justified, them he has also glorified.'<sup>8</sup> I request a reply to the question: Is justification bestowed on you in terms of the body or of the soul? But there can be no doubt about the answer, since justice, from which justification is derived, is naturally a mental, not a physical, quality.

(47) Man has been depicted by the Lord God, his artist. He is fortunate in having a craftsman and a painter of distinction. He should not erase that painting, one that is the product of truth, not of semblance, a picture, expressed not in

6 From the supposed connection between *ops* and the last two syllables in *anthropos*.

7 Lam. 3.25.

8 Rom. 8.28-30.



mere wax, but in the grace of God. I speak, also, of women. They erase that painting by smearing on their complexion a color of material whiteness or by applying an artificial rouge. The result is a work not of beauty, but of ugliness; not of simplicity, but of deceit. It is a temporal creation, a prey to perspiration or to rain. It is a snare and a deception which displeases the person you aim to please, for he realizes that all this is an alien thing and not your own. This is also displeasing to your Creator, who sees His own work obliterated. Tell me, if you were to invite an artist of inferior ability to work over a painting of another of superior talent, would not the latter be grieved to see his own work falsified? Do not displace the artistic creation of God by one of meretricious worth, for it is written: 'Shall I take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot?'<sup>9</sup> By no means!

He commits a serious offense who adulterates the work of God. It is a serious charge to suppose that man is to be preferred to God as an artist! It is serious, indeed, when God has to say this about you: 'I do not recognize My colors or My image, not even the countenance which I have made. What is not Mine I reject. Take up your abode with him who has painted you. Seek your favors from him to whom you have given payment.' What will be your reply?

(48) If it is a serious matter to adulterate the work of God, what shall we say of those who slay the work of God, who shed human blood and take away the life that God has granted? They say: 'Let us take away the just because he is useless to us.'<sup>10</sup> Hence we read today in the Gospel: 'The foxes have dens and the birds of the air have nests wherein to rest; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'<sup>11</sup> So the fox hides himself in a den and the birds protect

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<sup>9</sup> 1 Cor. 6.15.

<sup>10</sup> Wisd. 2.12.

<sup>11</sup> Matt. 8.20.

themselves in their nests. Man, however, does not hide himself in a den—rather, he is beguiled. The mouth of man is a den, and a deep den, too, is the heart of man where injurious and deceptive counsels and thoughts of evil reside.

You make preparations to take a walk while another man is setting a trap for you. 'You are going in the midst of snares'<sup>12</sup> which your enemies have planted secretly in your way. Make careful observations, therefore, so as not to be trapped in a net like a deer or in a snare like a bird. The deer avoids the net by the keenness of his vision. The bird escapes the snares by surveying the territory from a point aloft. No one plants his net or conceals his snare up there. And so, one whose 'citizenship is in heaven'<sup>13</sup> is not likely to be captured like a bird of prey.

And why do you wonder at man's deception of man when the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head? In fact, He has purposely made man to be such that He could find therein a place to rest His head. But when our neighbors find no repose in our hearts, but traps and snares therein for our fellow men, to whom we ought to give help, then Christ turns His head away from us—this head which He was so willing to offer on our behalf even to the point of death! Do not expose yourself, therefore, to deceitfulness, cruelty and unkindness, so that there may be occasion for Christ to rest His head on you.

(49) Moreover, He did not find rest when He had created such irrational creatures as fish and the various species of wild beasts. He found rest, however, after He had made man to His own image. Give ear to Him as He states on whom He finds rest: 'Or on whom shall I rest but on him that is humble and gentle and that trembleth at my words?'<sup>14</sup> There-

<sup>12</sup> Eccli. 9.20.

<sup>13</sup> Phil. 3.20.

<sup>14</sup> Isa. 66.2 (Septuagint).

fore, be humble and gentle, so that God may find rest in your affection.

He who does not find his rest in the beasts of the field will much less find repose in his bestial heart. There exist minds of bestial nature and wild beasts, too, in the form of men, concerning whom the Lord says: 'Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravening wolves.'<sup>15</sup> God does not find repose in these, but in the actions of man whom He has made to His image and likeness and who ought not to veil his head, since 'he is the image and glory of God.'<sup>16</sup>

To the soul of such a man He says: 'Behold, Jerusalem, I have painted thy walls.'<sup>17</sup> He did not say 'I have painted thy belly' or 'thy lower parts,' but 'I have painted thy walls,' thus proclaiming that the strong protection of walls was granted to man. In this way, by keeping careful watch on the walls, man can ward off the dangers involved in a siege. He says, therefore: 'I have given you neither delights nor the allurements of desire, neither incentives to luxurious living nor eagerness to possess another's dignities. You have been granted a substantial basis for erecting walls and lofty turrets by means of which you can banish fear of an enemy's assault and the dread of terrifying raids from legions of soldiers.'

In fact, you have in *Isaias* the speech made by the soul of a just man or of the Church: 'I am a fortified city, I am a city besieged,'<sup>18</sup> defended by Christ and besieged by the Devil. But he whom Christ aids ought not to be fearful of a siege. He is defended by spiritual grace and is besieged by the perils of this world. Hence, also, it is said in the *Canticles*: 'I am a wall and my breasts are as a tower.'<sup>19</sup> The wall is the

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<sup>15</sup> Matt. 7.15.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Cor. 11.7.

<sup>17</sup> Isa. 49.16.

<sup>18</sup> Isa. 27.10; Ps. 30.22.

<sup>19</sup> Cant. 8.10.

Church and the towers are her priests, who have full power to teach both the natural and the moral sciences.

(50) Be fully aware, O beautiful soul, of the fact that you are the image of God. And, man, be aware that you are the glory of God. Hear the words of the Prophet on the question of glory: 'Thy knowledge is become wonderful to me.'<sup>20</sup> That is to say, in my work your majesty, O God, has become more wonderful; in the counsels of men Your wisdom is exalted. When I contemplate myself such as I am known to You in my secret thoughts and deepest emotions, the mysteries of Your knowledge are disclosed to me.

Know then, man, your greatness and see to it that you never on any occasion become entrapped in the snares of the Devil, so as not to fall, perchance, into the jaws of that dread beast 'who as a roaring lion goes about seeking someone to devour.'<sup>21</sup> Take heed of what goes into you and what comes out. I do not refer to food which is absorbed and ejected,<sup>22</sup> but to words and thoughts. Do not allow yourself to be led into concupiscence in regard to a neighbor's wife or let your eye be captivated by the beauty of a woman who passes by. Your mind and your conversation should shun being involved in the crafty ways of seduction. Deceit should be far from your thoughts and you should not indulge in slander against your neighbor.

God has made you a hunter, not a harrier, for He says: 'Behold I will send you many hunters'<sup>23</sup>—hunters, not of crime, but of absolution therefrom; hunters, certainly not of sin, but of grace. You are a fisher of Christ, for whom it is said: 'Henceforth thou shalt make men live.'<sup>24</sup> Spread your nets, direct your eyes, and control your tongue in such a man-

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<sup>20</sup> Ps. 138.6.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Peter 5.8.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Matt. 5.11,17-19.

<sup>23</sup> Jer. 16.16.

<sup>24</sup> Luke 5.10.

ner that you destroy no one, but bring rescue to those who struggle in the waters. He has declared: 'Let him so stand so as to take heed lest he fall' and 'So run as to obtain the prize.'<sup>25</sup> So struggle that you may often discover that the crown is awarded only to him who has competed according to the rules.<sup>26</sup>

You are a soldier. Then take stock of the enemy, lest at night he may creep upon you. You are an athlete. Come to grips with your enemy, not with your head, but with your arms, lest he strike you in the eye. Let your vision be unobstructed and your offense be cautious so as to parry the attack; take advantage of his weaknesses, 'shunning blows on the body with watchful eyes'<sup>27</sup> and repelling the assault by aggressive action.

If you should suffer a wound, take heed and run to a physician, to seek a remedy in repentance. Take heed, because you are made of weak and stumbling flesh. May the good physician of souls, the Divine Word, come to your assistance. May the oracles of the Lord be to you like health-giving medicines. Take heed that no unrighteous word lie hidden in your heart, for it creeps through your body like poison, bringing with it deadly infection. Take heed, lest you forget the God who made you, and do not take His name in vain.

(51) When you have eaten your fill, build a home for your habitation, abounding in flocks and in gold and silver, together with all that you possess in plentiful abundance. Then 'take heed that thine heart be lifted up and thou remember not the Lord,'<sup>28</sup> as the Law states.

For 'what hast thou that thou hast not received?'<sup>29</sup> Do not

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<sup>25</sup> 1 Cor. 9.24.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. 2 Tim. 2.5.

<sup>27</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* 5.438.

<sup>28</sup> Deut. 8.14.

<sup>29</sup> 1 Cor. 4.7.

these things pass like a shadow?<sup>30</sup> Is not this home of yours but dust and desolation? Are not all these things false? Are not the treasures of the world mere vanities? Are you not yourself just ashes? Look into the sepulchers of men and take note that nothing will remain of you but bones and ashes. Look inside, I repeat, and tell me who in there is rich and who is poor? Distinguish now between the needy and the powerful. Naked we come into this world and naked we leave it. There are no distinctions discoverable among the bodies of the dead, unless, perchance, it may well be that those of the wealthy give forth a stronger odor because they were bloated with luxurious living. Who ever heard of a poor man dying of indigestion? His impoverished condition is beneficial to him. He exercises his body and does not overload it. 'I have not heard of the just man forsaken nor his descendants begging bread,'<sup>31</sup> because the man who labors well in his own land has a plentiful supply of food. Take heed, therefore, man of wealth, because you, like the poor man, bear your burden of flesh.

(52) Because your soul is a priceless thing, poor man, be on your guard. The soul is everlasting, although the flesh is mortal. Although you may lack money, you are not therefore devoid of grace. Although your house is not commodious, your possessions are not scattered. The sky is open and the expanse of the world is free. The elements have been granted to all for their common use. Rich and poor alike enjoy the splendid ornaments of the universe.

Are the paneled ceilings decked with gold<sup>32</sup> in the homes of the very wealthy more beautiful than the face of the heavens decorated with glistening stars? Are the estates of the rich more extensive than the surface of the world? Hence it was said of those who join house to house and estate to

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Eccle. 7.1.

<sup>31</sup> Ps. 36.25.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Horace, *Odes* 2.18.1.



estate: 'Shall you alone dwell in the midst of the earth?'<sup>33</sup> You have actually a larger house, you man of low estate—a house wherein your call is heard and heeded. 'O Israel,' said the Prophet, 'how great is the house of God and how vast is the place of his possession! It is great and hath no end: it is high and immense.'<sup>34</sup> The house of God is common to rich and poor. However, 'with difficulty will a rich man enter the kingdom of heaven.'<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps you resent the fact that 'the light of golden lamps'<sup>36</sup> do not shine in your home. But how much more brilliant is the suffused light of the moon! In winter you find a cause for complaint that you do not possess a room-heater with its 'breathing vapors.'<sup>37</sup> But you possess the heat of the sun, which tempers the surface of the earth and protects you from the cold of winter. Do you really consider those people happy 'who are attended by a mighty throng'<sup>38</sup> of obsequious servants? But those who rely on the feet of others lose by disuse the power of using their own. Hence, only a few of the servitors act as outriders; most of them are needed as bearers.

You may gaze in admiration on their abundance of money: gold and silver. You see how much they have in abundance, but you not see how much they need. To be able to recline in litters in ivory is, to your mind, the height of luxury. But you do not realize how luxurious a possession is the earth, which spreads its couch of grass for the humble man. Here are sweet repose and gentle sleep—such sleep as the restless owner of a golden bed seeks in vain to attain. How much happier does he consider you to be as you lie there so peacefully! So hard is it for him to invite sleep.

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<sup>33</sup> Isa. 5.8.

<sup>34</sup> Bar. 3.24,25.

<sup>35</sup> Matt. 19.23.

<sup>36</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.726.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 8.421.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 4.136.

Besides, there is, of course, another aspect which is much more important. I refer to the fact that the just man who is in want here will find abundance yonder and that he who has endured toil here will find elsewhere his consolation. Moreover, whoever has acquired goods here cannot hope to receive there a return for his investment. The poor man saves up his interest, whereas the rich man squanders it.

(53) The poor man and the rich man should therefore take heed, because there are temptations for the man of poverty as well as for the man of wealth. And so the wise man says:<sup>39</sup> 'Give me neither beggary nor riches.' He tells you how this can be attained. Man has enough when he has a sufficiency, because a wealthy man tends to distend his mind with cares and anxieties, just as he gorges his stomach with rich food. For that reason the wise man prays that he may have what is necessary and adequate, saying: 'Lest perhaps being filled I should be tempted to deny and say, who sees me? Or being compelled by poverty I should steal and forswear the name of the Lord.'

Shun and avoid, therefore, the temptations of the world, so that the poor may not despair and the rich may not grow proud. For it is written, when you have expelled the heathen and have begun to make use of their land: 'Lest thou shouldst say, my own might and the strength of my own hand have achieved all these things for me.'<sup>40</sup> Such a one is he who ascribes all his success to his own merits, and hence, feeling self-assured, does not recognize his own errors which drag him with their extended rope afar.<sup>41</sup> For, if he believes that his acquisition of property is due either to mere chance or to shrewd cunning, there is no occasion for him to feel undue pride in matters to which there is no glory attached,

<sup>39</sup> Prov. 30.8,9.

<sup>40</sup> Deut. 8.17.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Horace, *Epistles* 1.10.47,48.

or where the labor results in naught, or where there is evidence of shameless cupidity, which prescribes no limits in its pursuit of pleasure.

### *Chapter 9*

(54) But something must be said on the subject of the human body. Who can deny that it excels all things in grace and beauty? Although it seems in substance to be one and the same with all earthly things, certain wild animals have superiority in strength and size. Yet the form of the human body, by reason of its erectness and stature, is such that it lacks massive hugeness as well as abject lowliness. Moreover, the very appearance of the body is gentle and pleasing without those extremes of size and of insignificance which might lead either to dread or to indifference.

(55) First, let us make note of the fact that the body of man is constructed like the world itself. As the sky is pre-eminent over air, earth, and sea, which serve as members of the world, so we observe that the head has a position above the other members of our body. In the same way, the sky stands supreme among the other elements, just as a citadel amid the other outposts in a city's defense. In this citadel dwells what might be called regal Wisdom, as stated in the words of the Prophet: 'The eyes of a wise man are in his head.'<sup>1</sup> That is to say, this position is better protected than the others and from it strength and prevision are brought to bear on all the rest.

What avail are the strength and vigor of our muscles or the swiftness of our feet without the direction and assistance of the head, its commander-in-chief? From this source comes

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<sup>1</sup> Eccle. 2.14.

real support for all the members or their complete abandonment.

To what avail is courage in combat without the aid of the eyes? To what avail is flight, if sight be lacking? The body as a whole may be likened to a dark and filthy prison unless it is illuminated by the visual power of the eye. The eyes in man correspond to the sun and moon in the heavens. The sun and moon are the 'twin lights of the firmament.'<sup>2</sup> Our eyes are in our heads like stars which shine aloft and with their bright lights illuminate objects below, thus permitting us to avoid being involved, as it were, in nocturnal darkness. They are our sentries which keep watch day and night. They are aroused from slumber quicker than our other members and on awakening take stock of everything. They are nearer to the brain, the seat of our ability to see.

In answer to those who think that I have made a too hasty descent from the rest of the head in order to praise the eyes, I maintain that it is not unfitting to commend in part that which is most significant in itself. It is clear that the eyes constitute a part of the head. And so with the aid of the eyes the head examines all things. With the ears it lays bare what is secret, obtains knowledge of what is hidden, and hears of events that occur in remote lands.

(56) How gentle and pleasing is the sight of the top of the head, how attractive are its locks of hair, an object of regard for our elders, of reverence for our priests! For warriors, how fear-inspiring, for the young, how pleasing can these locks be, whether arranged becomingly as in the case of women or with the soft sheen of youth! Long hair is unbecoming to one sex; shorn locks do not become the other.

One can learn from trees how charming a human head can be. In the treetop everything stands for fruit, for beauty. The tree's hair-like foliage shields us from rain storms or

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2 Cf. Virgil, *Georgics* 1.5.

protects us from the sun. Take away the tree's leafy locks and the tree is wholly devoid of beauty. How precious, therefore, is this adornment for the human head! It protects and invests with hair the very center and source of all our senses, the brain, so that it may not be unduly affected by cold or heat! Therein is found the primary source of all our feelings. It is natural that beauty should be the attribute of that which is most sensitive to ill.

(57) What is man without his head, since the totality of man is in his head? When you see a head you recognize a man. If the head is lacking, no recognition is possible. He lies an ignoble trunk, without honor, 'a nameless corpse.'<sup>3</sup> Men pay reverence merely to the heads of princes cast in bronze or to their features carved in bronze or marble.<sup>4</sup>

Not without reason, therefore, do the other members pay their respects to the head as to their director. They surround it like servants bearing a litter and carry it aloft as something divine. Hence, it has the power of a censor, whereby directions and orders are given to the servants and special instructions are relayed to each individual. You have there a picture of each man willingly and without pay serving his commander-in-chief. Some serve as porters; others take care of the provisions. Some act as bodyguards; others as orderlies. They obey his orders as chief and minister to him as their master. Before him there seems to precede what may be termed the countersign or standing order, whereby the feet are directed to approach a certain region, enjoining what military service the hands should initiate and complete, and what disciplinary orders should be imposed on the stomach in the way of indulgence or abstention from food.

(58) A forehead free, open and with bare temples, adorns the head. According to its appearance one may judge a

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<sup>3</sup> Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.558.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.848.



person's state of mind, now joyful or sad, now frowning in moments of seriousness or smooth in moments of relaxation, answering in forensic fashion to one's inmost wish or will. Here we have a image of a mind giving, as it were, expression to words. Here is a foundation for belief, on which daily the name of the Lord is inscribed and preserved.

A two-fold hedge, the eyebrows, are next in order. These serve as a line of defense for the eyes and have a charm to lighten a beautiful smile and at the same time are attentive to their protective function. If any speck of sand or dirt, drops of misty vapor or of streaming sweat should fall down, the eyebrow serves to check it, so that no obstruction can disturb the delicately formed organs of vision.<sup>5</sup>

(59) Close to these mountain-like eyebrows are arranged the eyes, which are made safer by this bulwark of protection. From their high position they are enabled to perceive all things as if from a loftier stage. A position of less eminence, such as that of the ears, mouth, or cavernous nose, would ill befit the eyes. Watch towers are always placed on high, so that the approach of hostile bands can be detected—bands which are ready to take by surprise a city in the midst of a celebration, together with its people and its proud imperial army.

In this way, too, attacks from robbers may be anticipated, if scouts are placed on walls, towers, or on the brows of a high mountain. From these points the level regions below can be observed where raiding parties can find no hiding place. It happens also at sea that, when the nearness of land is suspected, a lookout eagerly climbs the topmost mast or the high yard arms and announces the sight of a distant land still invisible to the rest of the navigators.

(60) Perhaps you may say that if a watch must necessarily be placed in a high position, why are not the eyes not set in the very top of the head, as in the case of crabs and

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.143 (on the eyelids).



beetles who have no apparent head, but whose necks and backs are higher than the rest of the body? But these have a tough shell, whereas human beings have a tender covering of skin which can easily be cut and torn by briars and brambles. Moreover, other animals are so constituted that they either can guard their eyes by bending their heads toward their shoulders, as in the case of horses, oxen, and nearly all wild beasts, or turn them, as birds do, toward their wings for complete repose and protection.

It is right that the eyes should be set in the highest part of the body in a sort of citadel, there to defend themselves from all, even from the slightest attacking force.<sup>6</sup> Here we are faced with what appears to be a contradiction. If the eyes were placed in a lower position for reasons of safety, they would be unable to function; if in a higher, they would be exposed to injury. Wherefore, lest anything detract from their usefulness or lest any precaution against injury be not available, God has placed the eyes in a position where the eyebrows above provide no little defense and where the cheeks below contribute their mite of protecting embankment. In addition, the nose offers a covering for the interior position, while the exterior seems to be surrounded by a bulwark of defense in the protuberant masses of forehead and jaw—a structure, notwithstanding its connecting joints, arranged with due evenness and balance.

In the midst of these are found the orbs of the eyes. They are in a secure position for defense. They are free to make observation and, crystal-like, give forth beauty. In their midst are the pupils, which are the organs of sight. To provide for any possible injury, they are encircled with a rampart composed of an orderly arrangement of filaments of hair.

Hence, in requesting help and safety for himself the

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 2.140.

Prophet says: 'Keep me, O Lord, as the apple of your eye.'<sup>7</sup> He asks for the necessary custody and the protection of Him who has deigned to fortify the pupil of the eye with natural palisades. Because innocence and purity may be violated by the intrusion of a slight speck of dust and thus be deprived of the gift of grace, we must for that reason be on our guard lest the dust of error may cloud it or that any speck of sin cause it pain. It is written: 'First cast out the beam from thy own eye and then wilt thou see clearly to cast out the speck from thy brother's eye.'<sup>8</sup>

(61). Those skilled in the art of medicine maintain, in fact, that the brain is placed in a man's head for the sake of the eyes and that the other senses of our bodies are housed close together on account of the brain. The brain is the source of our nervous system and of all the sensations of voluntary movement. From it emanates the cause of all that we have discussed. It is the starting point of the arteries and of that natural heat which gives life and warmth to the vital parts. Many are of the opinion that this starting point is the heart. The nerves serve as organs of each of the senses. These proceed from the brain like cords and musical strings. They fulfill their individual functions throughout the various parts of the body.

Hence, the brain, because it is the gathering point of all the senses, is softer than the other organs. From it emanate the nerves which report everything; for example, what the eye sees and what the ear hears, what odor has been perceived, and what sound the tongue has given forth or what taste the mouth has experienced. That which is softer is more susceptible to impressions. The harder quality of the nervous system, which results in a certain tautness, makes for more efficacy in action.

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<sup>7</sup> Ps. 16.8.

<sup>8</sup> Matt. 7.5.

(62) The sense of hearing has also a highly important function, nearly on a par with that of sight. The ears are rather prominent for this and for several other reasons. They serve a decorative purpose and, secondly, are in the way of anything, moist or otherwise, which may fall from the top of the head. Again, their commodiousness makes it possible for them to receive in their recesses repercussions of sound without the danger of injuring the interior structure. If this were not the case how astonished we would be at the intrusion of any sound or of a voice stronger than usual! Even with our present organs of hearing are we not often benumbed by an unexpected burst of sound? You may note the fact however that they present a bulwark against bitter cold and burning heat. The open passage ways are impenetrable to these same attacks, whether from severity of cold or excess of heat.

The sinuous quality of the interior part of the ear furnishes a basis for training in modulation, since a certain rhythmic movement follows from the natural windings of the ear. The entry of a sound of a voice results, too, in specific tonal modifications. Again, our own experience tells us that such a sinuous character of the ear tends to better receptivity of the spoken word. We see that the voice is rendered gentler and sweeter in situations where we hear an echo in the mountain hollows, in rocky caves, or along winding streams.<sup>9</sup> Not without its usefulness, too, is the wax in the ear. It helps to keep the voice intact, a result which at one and the same time aids the memory and is a source of pleasure.

(63) What shall I say of the form of the nose, which offers for the perception of odors a cave-like structure with its two distended openings? The odor does not pass through in indifferent fashion, but stays long within, so that by this procedure it is able to satisfy fully the brain and the senses.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Georgics*, 4.49,50.

It frequently happens that a transient aroma may continue to stay with you for an entire day. Through the nose, too, flow purgaments issuing from the head in such a way that the body is not adversely affected in the process.

(64) The sense of touch is not without its significance. It represents the keenest sort of pleasure and gives as well an honest report of facts. Frequently, we are able to prove by touch what we cannot do with the aid of the eyes.

(65) Finally, there remain the functions of the mouth and tongue, which furnish strength to all the others. The eyes would not have the power of vision without the substantial basis of physical force provided by food and drink. The ears, nose, and hands would not be capable of hearing, smelling and touching, if the whole body were not sustained by nourishment. Our strength declines unless it is restored by continued absorption of adequate food. For that reason, those exhausted by hunger have no sensation of pleasure in the use of the senses. Not being, as it were, participants,<sup>10</sup> they have no part in the predilections of these senses.

(66) What shall I say of the rampart of teeth built for the mastication of food and for the full expression of the human voice? Without teeth, what pleasure would our daily sustenance give us? Hence we note that in this respect there is often a clear indication that old age has been reached. Because of the loss of teeth, really nourishing food cannot be assimilated.

(67) The tongue, too, fulfills a most important function in eating as well as in speaking. It acts like a plectrum or quill<sup>11</sup> in the production of speech. It might be compared to a hand in the process of bringing to the action of the teeth the food particles that otherwise would tend to fall. Speech has its special function. It is carried through the void on the

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.428.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum* 2.149.

wings of the air which is affected by this impulsive force, at once stirring and calming the emotions of the hearer, pacifying the angry, lifting up the down-hearted, and consoling the grief-stricken. Granted that man shares his vocal powers with the birds,<sup>12</sup> there is, nevertheless, nothing in the irrational animals which can be equated with the sound of the human voice, provided, as it is, with rational powers.

We share, in fact, with the rest of living beings the ordinary sense channels, but they do not make use of them in the same way we do. The heifer raises her eyes to the sky, but she is unaware of what she sees. This is true, also, of wild animals and birds. All living things have the same liberty to see, but man alone has the will to interpret what he perceives. He gazes at the rising and the setting of the celestial signs. He sees the glory of the sky and marvels at the starry orbs. He is aware of the diverse aspect of each star. He knows when the evening and the morning star arise and why they appear at these times. The movements of Orion, as well as the phases of the moon, are well known to him. He understands how 'the sun knows the hour of its setting'<sup>13</sup> and how it preserves its allotted course with due regularity.

Other living beings also have the power of hearing, but who other than man acquires knowledge by the sense of hearing? Man alone of all terrestrial beings is able by listening, reflection, and wisdom to gather the secrets of knowledge. He is able to say: 'I will hear what the Lord God will speak to me.'<sup>14</sup> The most important of all things is this: Man becomes the organ of the voice of God and gives utterance with his corporeal lips to the oracular words from

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12 Cf. the Epicurean doctrine in Lucretius 5.1379.

13 Ps. 103.19.

14 Ps. 84.9.



heaven, such as: 'Cry. What shall I cry? All flesh is grass.'<sup>15</sup> He heard what he ought to say and he cried aloud.

Let those who mark out with a compass the regions of the sky and of the earth keep their wisdom for themselves. Let them have that knowledge of which the Lord speaks: 'The wisdom of the prudent I will reject.'<sup>16</sup> Neither the rhythm of a speech nor the tones and notes of musical science will enter into my discussion at this point. I shall confine myself to that wisdom of which the Prophet speaks: 'The uncertain and hidden things of thy wisdom thou hast made manifest to me.'<sup>17</sup>

(68) What shall I say of the kiss which is a symbol of affection and love? Doves exchange kisses, but what is this compared to the charm of a kiss of a human being in which the note of friendliness and kindness is conspicuous, and where is expressed the indubitable sense of our sincerest affection?

Hence the Lord, condemning His betrayer as a species of monstrosity, says: 'Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?'<sup>18</sup> That is to say, changing the emblem of love into a sign of betrayal and to a revelation of unfaithfulness, are you employing this pledge of peace for the purpose of cruelty? And thus by the oracular voice of God reproof is given to him who by the bestial conjunction of lips bestows a sentence of death rather than a covenant of love.

It is worthy of note, too, that it is given to men alone to express with their lips what they feel in their hearts. Hence we make evident our tacit mental reflections with the speech that flows from our lips. What is the mouth of man but an

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<sup>15</sup> Isa. 40.6.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Cor. 1.19; Isa. 29.14.

<sup>17</sup> Ps. 50.8.

<sup>18</sup> Luke 22.48.



avenue for discourse, a fount of disputation, a reception hall for words, a repository of the will?

We have now completed our general discussion of the human body. It can be compared to a royal palace, which, though it has a number of adjoining halls, still preserves the appearance of a unified whole.

(69) To come down to particulars, there is the throat or neck through which vital contacts are made with the whole body and through which, too, the coursing flow of this breath of ours is poured.

Next we have the arms, and the strong fore-arm muscles, together with the hands strong for action and adaptable for holding objects by reason of their prolonged fingers. Hence that greater aptitude for work, that elegance in writing, and that 'pen of the scrivener that writeth swiftly,'<sup>19</sup> whereby the oracles of God are set down in writing. It is the hand that serves the mouth with food. Great are the deeds for which the hand is eminent. The hand is placed on the holy altars as conciliator of divine grace. Through it we offer as well as partake in the celestial sacraments. It is the hand which performs and at the same time dispenses the divine mysteries. The Son of God did not disdain to declare by the mouth of David: 'The right hand of the Lord hath wrought strength: the right hand of the Lord hath exalteth me.'<sup>20</sup> It is the hand which has created all things, as the omnipotent God has said: 'Did not my hand make all these things?'<sup>21</sup> The hand is the outpost of the entire body, as well as the defender of the head. Although it is lower in position, the hand serves to decorate and beautify the top of the head with becoming adornments.

(70) Who can worthily describe the wicker-work of the

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19 Ps. 44.2.

20 Ps. 117.16.

21 Isa. 66.2.

chest<sup>22</sup> or the tenderness of the stomach? If it were not for these, the more delicate internal organs could not be protected and the folds of the intestines would undoubtedly be injured by the hard structure of bone. What is more conducive to health than that the lungs should hold a position contiguous to the heart? When the heart flares up with anger and indignation, it can soon be moderated by the action of the blood and vapor in the lungs. Again, the lungs are tender because they are ever filled with moisture so as to offset immediately the rigidity induced by indignation.

We have set forth these matters in a fashion so brief and succinct that we seem, in the manner of the unskilled, just to touch on the merely obvious. Our purpose is not to probe deeply like a physician nor is it our design to search into what is hidden far in the haunts of nature.

(71) The close association of the spleen and the liver leads to good results. The spleen absorbs what it feeds on, eliminates whatever refuse is found there. The result is that whatever food is left is able in its liquified condition to pass through the very fine fibers of the liver and is then transformed into blood. This serves to produce vital strength and is not evacuated with the excrements of the body.

The construction of the intestines with their involved folds, woven without entanglement one with the other, indicates nothing else but the divine providence of the Creator, inasmuch as food particles neither pass quickly through the stomach nor are they immediately evacuated. If this were to happen, men would have an incessant hunger and continuous craving for food. For, when the interior is emptied and drained at the moment when the food is being immediately evacuated, an inordinate and insatiable desire for food and drink must necessarily follow—a result which without question may lead to an early death.

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22 Cf. Virgil, *Aeneid* 12.508.

It is providentially designed, therefore, that the food be first digested in the upper ventricle and next be liquified in the exhalation of the liver. The resulting fluid is then transfused into the rest of the body. Our limbs are nourished by this substance, providing growth for the young and endurance for the old. The superfluous residue is carried through the intestines and finds its exit by the customary 'door in the side.'<sup>23</sup>

(72) In Genesis it is fittingly stated that the ark of Noe, was formed in the fashion of the human body. Of the ark God said: 'Make thee an ark of timber planks. Thou shalt make little rooms and thou shalt pitch it within and without.' The outward appearance was as follows: 'The door in the ark thou shalt set in the side with lower, middle chambers and third stories shalt thou make it.'<sup>24</sup> By this the Lord meant that 'the door set in the side' was to be the place through which superfluous food was to be ejected. It is fitting, also, that the channel for refuse was placed by the Creator remote from man's countenance, so that, when we bend over, our countenance may not be contaminated. At the same time, take note of the fact that the shameful parts of the body are placed there where they cannot cause us shame when they are suitably covered with clothing.

(73) The pulsation of the veins is a messenger either of infirmity or of health. Although the veins are spread throughout the entire body, they are neither exposed nor uncovered. They are sheathed in such a slight coating of flesh that one can easily find them and as readily feel them. There is no thick covering of flesh which can conceal them from view. The bones, too, are all covered with a thin coating of flesh and are bound with the tendons. Those on the top of the

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<sup>23</sup> Gen. 6.16.

<sup>24</sup> Gen. 14.1.

head have the advantage of being covered with a thin skin. They are clothed, also, with a thick growth of hair, the better to provide protection against rain and cold.

What shall I say of the genitals, which from the veins in the region of the neck through the reins and loins receive the generating seed destined for the function and satisfaction of procreation?

(74) What shall I say of the purpose of the legs, which, without suffering any ill effects, are sufficient to sustain the weight of the whole body? The knee has a certain flexibility, by reason of which the offended master is especially appeased, his ire softened, and his favors induced. This is the gift of the most high Father to His Son: 'That in the name of the Lord every knee should bend of those in heaven, on earth and under the earth and every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus is in the glory of God the Father.'<sup>25</sup>

There are two things which above all others give delight to God: humility and faith. The leg expresses the emotion of humility and the submission of constant service. Faith makes the Son equal to the Father and makes evident that the same glory belongs to each.

That man should have two legs and not more is altogether fitting. Wild animals and beasts have four legs, while birds possess two. Hence man has kinship with the winged flock in that with his vision he aims at what is high. He flies as if 'on the oarage of wings'<sup>26</sup> by reason of the sagacity of his sublime senses. Hence it was said of him: 'Your youth is renewed like the eagle's,'<sup>27</sup> because he is near what is celestial and is higher than the eagle, as one who can say: 'But our citizenship is in heaven.'<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Phil. 2.10.

<sup>26</sup> A Virgilian expression often repeated.

<sup>27</sup> Ps. 102.5.

<sup>28</sup> Phil. 3.20.

*Chapter 10*

(75) But now we seem to have reached the end of our discourse, since the sixth day is completed and the sum total of the work of the world has been concluded. There has taken place, in fact, the creation of man himself, who holds the principate over every living thing and is what might be called the summation of the universe and the delight of every creature in the world.

Surely we should now make our contribution of silence, since God has rested from the work of the world.<sup>1</sup> He found repose in the deep recesses of man, in man's mind and purpose, for He had made man with the power of reasoning, an imitator of Himself, a striver after virtue, and one eager for heavenly grace. God finds comfort in these traits, as His own testimony declares: 'Or on whom shall I find repose but on him who is humble and peaceful and who trembles at my words?'<sup>2</sup>

(76) I give thanks to our Lord God, who made a work of such a nature that He could find rest therein. He made the heavens. I do not read that He rested. He made the earth. I do not read that He rested. He made the sun, moon, and stars. I do not read that He found rest there. But I do read that He made man and then found rest in one whose sins He would remit.

It may well be that He had given a symbolic picture then of the future Passion of the Lord, thus revealing that in man one day Christ would find repose. He anticipated for Himself repose [of death] in the body for the redemption of mankind, as He declares in His own words: 'I have slept and taken my rest and I have risen up, because the Lord

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gen. 2.2.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. 66.2 (Septuagint).

hath protected me.’<sup>3</sup> He, the Creator, rested. To Him be honor, praise, and glory everlasting from the beginning of time, now, always, and for ever. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Ps. 3.6.